WORLDS OF TOMORROW

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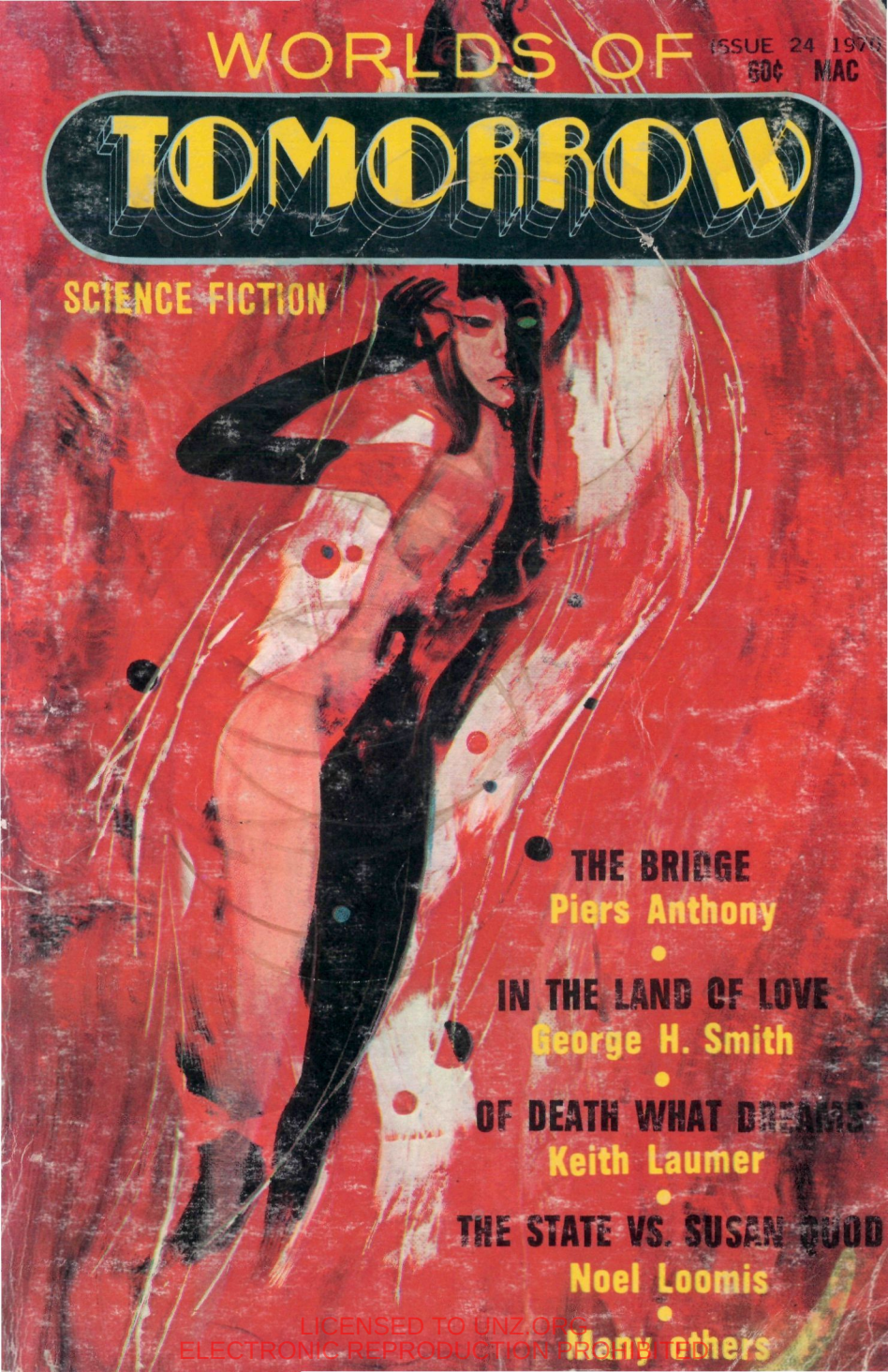
SCIENCE FICTION



THE BRIDGE
Piers Anthony

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IN THE LAND OF LOVE
George H. Smith

•

OF DEATH WHAT DREAMS
Keith Laumer

•

THE STATE VS. SUSAN GOOD
Noel Loomis

•

Many others

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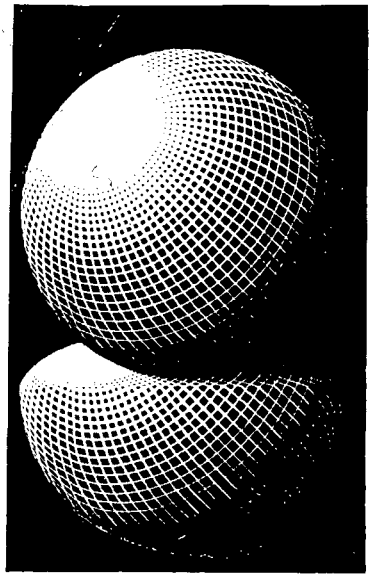

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WORLDS OF TOMORROW

SCIENCE FICTION
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ALL STORIES NEW

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A PAGE FOR TOMORROW 4

Cover by GAUGHAN; suggested by THE BRIDGE

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A PAGE FOR TOMORROW

This issue is uniquely yours.

It grew out of no preconceived plan except to meet your demand for stories dealing differently and imaginatively with tomorrow. Who knows about tomorrow? Here is what it brought us:

KEITH LAUMER'S novella, *Of Death What Dreams* (page 22) presents a multilevel society where the Gross National Product becomes a numbers game played only at the slum level. Next an old friend—

NOEL LOOMIS. "Hot Lead" Loomis drifted over the transom with *The State vs. Susan Quod* (page 102), a speculation on what really might differentiate humans from androids—once androids had learned not only to live but die like men. The story marked Noel's return to science fiction after an absence of twelve or more years—altogether he wrote more than fifty books—Westerns, science fiction and other novels, scholarly histories—and he enjoyed several movie sales. This story proved his final one.

I last saw Noel fifteen years ago in New Mexico. He wore a black Stetson, gray jacket, black pants and, I think, cowboy boots and stood staring across the edge of a sunlit mesa. But we had a brief and happy reunion on the phone over *Susan Quod*. Noel liked to anticipate editors and composed his stories directly on his personal linotype machine, bypassing a typewriter —hence the "Hot Lead" nickname.

Noel died last September. Many shall sorely miss him.

PIERS ANTHONY'S *The Bridge* (page 75) kicked this issue into a new an unanticipated direction. Dealing essentially with other dimensions, this story might have happened yesterday, today or tomorrow. It breaks taboos and had been homeless—and is a subtle tale against prejudice on many levels.

GEORGE H. SMITH'S *In The Land of Love* (page 4) followed and eventually turned up leading off the issue. If you've ever wondered what would happen if love truly conquered all—don't fail to read it.

MARK POWER'S *Histoport 3939* (page 123) speaks of man's age-old romance with greed in the farthest reaches of the future.

EDWARD YARDE BREESE'S *Tell Me* (page 97) leaps across the ages to put the past into tomorrow's perspective.

K. H. HARTLEY'S *The Mallinson Case* (page 137) brings up a legal puzzle made possible by today's passions combining with tomorrow's super-technology.

JAMES BASSETT'S *Serum SOB* (page 86) depicts the death of one more lovely, humanity-saving dream and—

RACHEL COSGROVE PAYES'S *Private Phone* (page 145) brings tomorrow a little closer than many of us might like.

So above is the step-by-step evolution of this particular issue of *WORLDS OF TOMORROW*. The stories came to us in the order given, were bought for the reasons given—not one was solicited.

—JAKOBSSON

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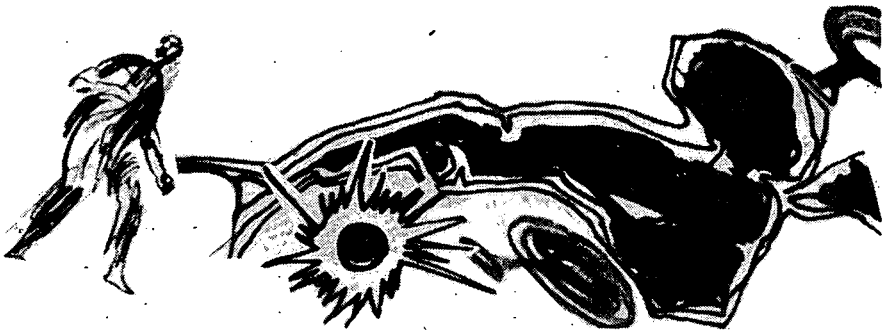

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I

WHAT do you do if you live in a world where the seas are covered over with concrete, where no one has ever seen a blade of grass and everyone lives to a great old age; where various and sundry kinds of Buddhism are the state religions, where no one may kill an animal and people stay alive on a gruel-like protein supplement known as Mana and spend their time watching light shows and listening to acid-rock music and Zen sermons while they smoke their THC, artificial pot?

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George H. Smith

What do you do in a world where families are composed of a hundred and fifty to two hundred persons, related and unrelated, and everyone loves everyone else? What do you do?

If you're Grandpopkins Jeb MacAllison, you live with your tribe in the third cubicle in the second corridor of level sixty-three, building block seven-thirty-five and you squat in a corner of the room behind the Living Console that controls the air, heat, water and food supply of the cubicle. You squat there and try to avoid the naked and nearly naked bodies of the other fifty to sixty people in the room. You squat there and try to think your own thoughts above

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the babble of dozens of children's voices. You also try to ignore the other sounds—the talking, laughing, coughing, flatulating, urinating, defecating, copulating noises that many people make when they're cooped up in one not very large room.

But the thing Grandpopkins MacAllison—the one-hundred-and-ten-year-old living anachronism of another age, the wiry little monkey-faced ex-Sergeant Major of the U. S. Marine Corps guilty of living beyond his time—does most is try to avoid the eyes of Fredericka, his great-granddaughter, the Earth Mother of the MacAllison tribe.

So he sat quietly in the corner, trying to hide, but that day he was not successful because the Earth Mother was all-seeing, all-knowing and all-loving. She wound her way through the press of bodies, her baby-full belly leading the way and a smile of pure beautitude lighting her face.

"Grandpopkins—Grandpopkins," she called. "What are you doing in that corner all by yourself? What a thing to do! You're not relating. You're not loving."

Grandpopkins tried to pull his head inside the long-sleeved smock that was his only item of clothing but the gesture was not successful. She loomed over him like a giant symbol of the times. He looked up at her with loathing and wondered how much longer it would take him to die.

"Come on, Grandpopkins, we're going to have a groovy time. The oldest and the youngest are going to play love games in the other room. Upsy daisy." She reached out to pull him to his feet.

"Let me alone, blast you. Let me alone," he snarled.

Fredericka looked hurt as only a fertility symbol can look hurt. Fredericka dripped with fertility. She exuded love. She was the Earth Mother, all-embracing, all-smothering, the final cosmic goo that was covering the world with L-O-V-E.

God, how he hated that word—it was the final and ultimate four-letter obscenity of them all.

"Wow! You're really up tight, aren't you, Grandpopkins?" the girl said. "You're not grooving. I'll bet you didn't shoot your speed this morning and forgot your smack last night."

"I didn't forget it," Grandpopkins growled, trying not to look at the naked belly bulging above the tree-trunk legs. "I didn't forget it, I threw it away. I don't dig that stuff. I'd like a little drink once in a while but I don't want that filthy stuff."

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Fredericka shook her head until her waist-length tresses floated around her plump bosom.

"That sauce is a bad scene. You know it poisons your system and uses up food calories that could go for the Overseas Brothers."

"To hell with the Overseas Brothers," Grandpopkins said. "The hell with everyone but me. I only got a little while to live. Why can't I have something I enjoy?"

"You are un-hip, Old One," Earth Mother said. "You are without love in your soul. The acid could blow your mind and free you of your hangups. Come to the love games."

Again she tried to pull him to his feet, but he resisted with all the strength left in his wiry little body.

"Look, why can't I just crawl away and curl up someplace by myself? I have only a few more weeks—why can't I be alone to die in peace?"

"What a down thing to say," Earth Mother's usually placid features registered shock. "What an uncool way to talk. The children love you. The whole tribe loves you. How could you think of denying us the example of your calm acceptance of your Karma?"

"Ain't got no Karma," Grandpopkins said. "Karma's a bunch of Buddhist bullshit. I been a soldier all my life—killed a lot of men who needed killing and enjoyed doing it, balled a lot of women who needed balling and loved it, drunk a lot of booze that needed drinking and enjoyed my hangovers afterward."

"Oh, a bad trip, the sauce," Earth Mother said. "If you'd just let me put a little acid in your mock tea, then—"

"Then my brains would be as addled as yours? No, thank you. I'm hung up on reality. I've lived and I'm gonna die and go to hell. And you know what, you overblown baby factory? After this place filled with treakle and dope, I'm gonna like it in hell."

"That's a bad scene, to talk like that," Earth Mother said. "I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I think Chief Speed should hear the awful things you say to me."

She turned and called to a big, lumbering youth in cycle helmet and Indian loincloth who was standing on the tribe's only table. He had been trying to sort out a group of screeching, fighting children.

"Chief Speed, come and hear the awful things Grandpopkins is saying."

"Sure, chick, sure," Chief Speed said.

He leaped over the heads of a half-dozen preteeners who sat in a

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circle reciting their mantas and fondling each other as part of their sensitivity training. Grandpopkins looked at the approaching youth with loathing. Chief Speed was Earth Mother's Number One and had begot most of the children she littered the place with. He was also the tribe's unofficial master-at-arms and enforcer of L-O-V-E.

"What's the reverend Old One up to this time?" Chief Speed asked, thrusting his black-bearded face close to Grandpopkin's and splattering saliva all over the old man as he did so.

"He gets me so up tight sometimes," Earth Mother said. "I love him—we all love him—but the things he says. Just now he said that Karma was Buddhist bullshit, that he didn't have any and that he didn't care whether the Overseas Brothers had food or not. He said to hell with them."

Chief Speed shook his head sadly. "Old Man, you have lived long but you ain't acquired no Satori. Your vibrations are all bad."

"Yes, yes," Earth Mother agreed, "his vibes are uncool."

"Yes, yes," said Peter Rabbit and Flopsy who had trailed after Chief Speed. "His vibes are uncool. He does not relate."

"He is up tight," Mopsy said. "He will be forever without love in his soul unless he turns on."

"We love you, Grandpopkins, you sweet old man," Dracula said, joining the group, "but you put us down when you say things like that."

THEY were crowding him. He couldn't breathe. He wanted to scream but he knew that all his old vocal chords could manage was a loud croak so he didn't bother.

"You mustn't say things like that," Chief Speed said. "They are down trip things. We must all love our Overseas Brothers. Zen is all—and each man's Karma is the concern of all his tribe."

"Tribe-smibe," Grandpopkins said. "I never saw most of you pea-pickers until you moved in here."

"Oh, bad scene. Bad scene," several voices said at once.

"Grandpopkins, you are unkind as well as uncool," Earth Mother said, struggling valiantly to keep the L-O-V-E on her face. "You know our family came to us because they loved us."

"Yes," they chorused, "we took you as our parent of our own accord."

"Sure you did," he said bitterly. "In this acid-headed, speed-freaked excuse for a society, every child six years old has the right

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to decide for himself who his family will be. Sometimes I wonder if my veteran's pension didn't have something to do with it."

They all shook their heads sadly.

"There is no love in his soul," they said.

"You have to stop talking like this," Chief Speed said. "You know the Great Gurus in Hashbury and the White Brotherhood on Mount Shasta have agreed that we must love our Overseas Brothers above ourselves and that their bellies must be filled even if ours go empty. They have decreed that all must love their tribe above themselves. You know that the way to Satori lies in the love that dispels Karma. You must turn yourself on."

"Go to hell," Grandpopkins said, trying to change his crouch as he suddenly realized that it resembled the lotus position.

"You have a possessive, manipulatory, symbolic mind," Flopsy said, bobbing his shaggy head. "The cure is in these little crystals, the sacrament that will return you to the Temple of God. Turn on, Old One, before it is too late."

"Turn on, Old One," Mopsy said, kneeling in front of him and reaching out one hand. "Get out of your mind. Seek the Cosmic Consciousness. Let me make you feel groovy."

"Get your cold, dirty hands off my genitals, young woman, before I kick you in the crotch. I'm too old to turn on that way."

"He doesn't understand," Mopsy said lamentingly, unhanding him. "He can't relate to love."

"I'm up to here in L-O-V-E," Grandpopkins said. "If I was twenty years younger, I'd go out with a lamp like Diogenes and look for a man who can hate."

A murmur of horror went up from the members other of the tribe.

Eleven-year-old Tinker Bell who stood in front of the others scratching her very pregnant belly was the only one to react positively.

She giggled.

"Sick. Sick. Sick," Chief Speed said. He rose from the floor, where he had been communicating love to a cockroach that crawled among the dirty feet. "If you don't stop talking like that, we'll have to call the Peace Guards."

"Yes, yes," they all said together. "You better cool it. We all love you, dear old man, but if you say down things, we'll have to call the Peace Guards."

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II

THE threat brought a tingle of fear to Grandpopkin's sluggish blood stream and was followed at once by a pleasurable surge of adrenalin he hadn't thought himself capable of. People taken away by the Peace Guards never came back. When the biggest problem you had was the other guy perpetually standing on your foot, who cared what happened to those taken away? But Grandpopkins wondered about them.

"Who are the Peace Guards?" he asked, not because he didn't know but just to see what answer these drug-befuddled minds would produce.

The members of the tribe looked at one another as though trying to remember. Flopsy finally spoke. Flopsy was generally assumed to be an old soul, a life returnee. For some reason known only to the Great Gurus of Hashbury he had been chosen to have his soul/mind electrical emanations captured after death and reassembled by the rebirth computers.

"The Peace Guards are the beautifully beatific Overseas Brothers that World Peace Headquarters in Bombay has sent to walk among us," Flopsy said.

"Why?"

Flopsy puzzled over this for a moment before answering. Then he smiled. "So that we can have the benefit of their beautifully Oriental example in our daily living. The West has ever sat at the feet of the great culture of the East."

"But what are they really here for?" Grandpopkins insisted. "Who asked them to come here?"

"None needed to ask them," Flopsy said. "World Mother India in her all-seeing, collective wisdom knew our need of them and sent them to us just as she sent them to Europe and Africa. Of course, that was after Father Mao—may His celestial soul be thrice-blessed—and the Sov Frost Giants had destroyed each other with the thunder-lightning weapons from the heaven. That was when All-Mother India had to assume the guidance of the world."

"That doesn't tell me anything," Grandpopkins said. "Why are they here in this place where we live?"

"They've come to help us find Satori," Tinker Bell said. "They see that we don't eat too much. If you eat too much, you can't achieve Satori."

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"Ah-ha! To help us achieve Satori—or to enforce the food tribute that North America must pay to fill the endless billion bellies of All-Mother India?"

They didn't even know what he was talking about. They stared at him blankly.

"What is North America?" First Little Pig asked.

Grandpopkins looked at First Little Pig. Sometimes he had a little hope for this lad. He was about ten, a round-faced boy with an alertness in his eyes that occasionally managed to show through the acid haze.

"North America is what this place used to be called," Grandpopkins told him. "It was once the richest country in the world—but even its riches weren't enough to feed the whole planet. So now we all starve or live on gruel and drugs."

"That's bad think," Earth Mother said. "That sounds like history. History is against the principles of World Love. History has been replaced by Re-History Sensitivity Awareness."

"How could the Peace Guards enforce anything when there's only a few of them and they're unarmed except for their shining example?" Chief Speed said.

"How do you know there are only a few?" Grandpopkins demanded. "They come and go as they please in their floaters. And who says they're not armed?"

"Like they only got their Pre-Frontal guns," First Little Pig said. "I saw the Sector Leader zap old man Fowler with his one day. Old man Fowler had bought some fish heads from a food pusher and wouldn't give them up. *Zap! Zap!* Just like that old man Fowler's ugly face changed and he became all sweetness and light. Those Zap guns give you a blast that even STP can't beat."

"Zap guns are peace weapons," Flopsy said. "Everyone knows that."

"Yeah, they're the gadgets All-Mother India used to call God's Brainwash," Grandpopkins said. "Those are what they taught love for All-Mother India with. They taught it to the Pakistanians, the Kashmiris, the Burmese, the Afghans and the Iranians."

"Love is what All-Mother teaches to all," Flopsy said.

"Sure, L-O-V-E for All-Mother India is the first principle," Grandpopkins said. "How many of you have been zapped by those Pre-Frontals?"

Their faces stared back at him blankly and he began to feel sick.

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The breathlessness of his congestive heart condition was coming on. He welcomed it because it meant his time here was less every time it happened. If he died that way, he wouldn't have to use the commando knife he kept hidden under his burlap robe. The same commando knife he had used in the last war, the war they called the Swedish Acid War. That was when The Land of Love and All-Mother India had smashed the Swedish arms factory that for generations had supported that Nordic land of peace and neutrality. The arms that had made war possible for Fascist Spain, Nazi Germany, Viet Cong Terrorists and the Arabian Psycho State. Yeah, that had been a neat little war. He could still remember the excitement of knife against knife in the snow and the whistle of the long bows as they hurled STP gas shells. Afterward had come the peace and Sweden had changed from being the arms supplier of the world to its acid factory. But that was a long time ago and now he was tired and couldn't get his breath.

"Go away, all of you," he said. "Can't you see I'm sick? I want to be alone."

"No, no, no!" they cried. "You are up tight. We want to help you. We want to love you."

"You need to turn on, Honey-popkins," Mopsy said.

"A little speed, sweet old man," Sunflower Sam said.

"Some acid for the stomach's sake," Flopsy said.

"At least a little pot for the soul."

THEY crowded still closer around him until he was sure he would be trampled. Finally he had to crawl out between bare, hairy legs, under the Console and out the other side to escape them.

A pair of teeners were in the alcove on the other side. They were balling it and their hair, legs and arms were all tangled up in ways he couldn't fathom. A head looked up. It was thickly covered with red hair and an Indian feather was sticking out of it. A hand was lifted in greeting.

"Peace! Love, Old One. May the Great Spirit send many summers and much blessedness!"

Grandpopkins cursed to himself. He had been hoping this other hiding place of his would be unoccupied so he could curl up and suffer by himself.

Another head appeared and another hand was raised in greeting.

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"Peace be on your wise gray head."

"Go take a flying—" He let the words trail off. Profanity had no meaning to the Love Children. He just shook his head and crawled away through piles of sleeping children and manta-reciting teeners.

Maybe if he went to the bathroom he could have a few minutes alone. He dragged himself to his feet and picked his way through the couples rolling on the floor in the throes of love until he reached the tribe's only bathroom. Bathroom was a misnomer, of course, because none of the tribe ever used the tub, that being considered unholy.

There was a line in front of the door. Most of the Love Children were willing to urinate or defecate on the floor, but Earth Mother was pretty rough on those who did, so they were forced to use the toilet fairly regularly unless it was stopped up with cigarette butts or the capsules that held the government-issued acid.

Beyond the line he could see a hair-covered figure that could have been either male or female sitting on the stool. They never thought of shutting the door. That would have been un-love.

The ones at the end of the line turned and greeted him with their usual sticky warmth.

"Look who's here, kids. It's Grandpopkins," Maid Marion said.

"Wow! Beatiful! It's so groovy to see you!" said something he assumed was another girl because he could see the tips of breasts poking through its hair.

"Groovy! Groovy!" Sitting Bull said, grabbing him and kissing him on the mouth.

"Let me go—I don't feel good," he whined. "I need to go to the bathroom."

"Hey, you cats, let Grandpopkins through to the head of the line!" Sitting Bull said. "Come on, sweet old man, your love children will stand aside for you."

Grandpopkins shivered with loathing as they pushed him along from hand to hand. He trembled with disgust at the kisses and friendly fondlings and the whispered endearments.

I hate you . . . I hate you . . . I hate you all! . . .

He reached the door and staggered inside as the previous occupant left. Then he closed the door in the scandalized faces of his loved ones. Collapsing onto the toilet, he tried to get his breath. As he sat there, he stared around at the tiny room. In addition to sanitary facility, it served as the tribe's art gallery.

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The pictures always bothered him because he couldn't remember their significance. They were of Holy Byron, Blessed John, The Glorious Three—Tommy, Joe and Norman, Beatified Lee Harvey, Twice Sanctified Sirhan, Celestial Earl Ray and Loved Above All Bobby Jim. All he could remember was that whatever they had done had led to the Assassin Time which had been followed by the City Burning and the Kill Orgy. Those events were dim in his mind but he knew they had brought about the end of the imperialistic monster nation called the United States and brought into being The Land of Love.

But he couldn't quite fit it all together. The only thing he really knew about the pictures was they were all filled with Great Satori.

THESE things bothered him from time to time but the gig that really blew his mind was the L-O-V-E, the sickening, saccharine, universal L-O-V-E. The touching, the kissing, the perpetual body rubbing. When he had been young and the juices had been still running, rubbing against a young chick would have meant something. But this rubbing with all ages and all sexes would have driven him insane and now it meant only one thing—they would never leave him alone—never, never leave him alone.

"Hey, Grandpopkins!" Someone was pounding on the door. "Do it or get off the pot. We ain't got all day. It's almost time for the love feast."

He shuddered. At exactly five o'clock every afternoon the Console poured out bowls of the gruel called Mana. His stomach churned at the thought of the tasteless stuff but he shrugged and flushed the toilet and went out to suffer the touching and the kissing again.

He ducked around a five-year-old who was trying to climb the steel wall and was turning his fingers into bloody stumps because of a bad STP trip. He stepped over a group of preteeners who had given one of their sisters an overdose of Meth so she could pull a train for the rest of the night without wearing out.

"Love! Love!" she screamed as she writhed on the floor and the boys stood waiting their turn. "Groovy! Groovy!"

The crowd was starting to gather about the Console for the Love Feast and in a few minutes the light shows would begin and acid rock would reverberate through the room in mind-deadening decibels. Grandpopkins pushed toward the Console, his belly growling

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in anticipatory protest. He had almost reached the end of the line when there was a heart-stopping roar in the corridor, the squeal of brakes and piercing screams that were cut off quickly.

He turned and saw Little Beaver come running in from the corridor, giggling and spreading the word about what had happened.

"That Super-Zapper! He's more fun than a blast of smack!" the boy said. "He really turns me on with that hog of his."

"What did he do?" Mopsy asked. She had sprinkled wheat germ over her Mana and was stuffing it into her mouth.

"He zapped two kids from Grant Tribe who were balling it on the floor. He came roaring around the curve of the corridor and smashed right over them with his hog. They were snuffed right in the middle of their love. Super-Zapper sent them to Nirvana from Nirvana with no stops in between."

"Groovy!"

"Super-Zapper scores again!"

"Good trip!"

A roar of laughter and approval had gone up from the MacAllison tribe. Everyone laughed but Grandpopkins. He cursed.

"Somebody ought to do something about the psycho cyclist. He's got no right zooming through the corridors that way. He's killed people before. I think he does it on purpose."

"Of course he does it on purpose. Super-Zapper is too groovy on a hog to kill by accident," Earth Mother said. She was sitting with a sucking baby at each ponderous breast and another lying across her lap gurgling and waving. As he looked at her Grandpopkins wanted to puke. He had never seen her looking more like the symbol of an over-fecund world and he had never hated her more.

"It's like he's putting on street theater," Sunflower Sam said. "He's doing his thing to blast the minds of the squares."

"What squares?" Grandpopkins asked.

"The children love it," Earth Mother said. "It gives them something to look forward to. Super-Zapper has great Satori."

"He ought to be put away," Grandpopkins said. "Someone ought to call the police."

Everyone looked shocked. They peered around as though to make sure no outsiders had heard him.

"Like, sweet old man, there ain't no more pigs," Sunflower Sam said. "There haven't been any since the Peace Guards came."

Grandpopkins nodded. The last police had disappeared shortly

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after the arrival of the Peace Guards and the Peace Guards didn't concern themselves with things like murder. They were mainly interested in wiping out the food pushers and keeping the supplies moving to the Overseas Brothers and stamping out un-love thoughts.

"I still say he ought to be locked up."

"That's an un-love thought, man," Sunflower Sam said. "You got no call to talk about putting Super-Zapper away. He's got soul."

"Like he's snuffed a few cats," Chief Speed said, "You wouldn't want to put him in a cage for that, would you?"

"He's just doing his thing," Earth Mother said. "When the emanations from the Cosmos say Zap, he's got to zap."

There was no use talking to them. Their minds were closed to everything but drugs, light shows and rock. He shrugged wearily and, picking up his bowl of gruel, went into the corridor to eat. There at least he could miss part of the rock and light show.

III

DAN SEWARD who was almost as old as he was but could remember better was sitting in a corner watching the mechs clean up the mess Super-Zapper had made of the two Grant Tribe kids.

"How you doing, Dan?" Grandpopkins said, squatting beside the other old man.

"Pretty good, Jeb. How about yourself?" Dan said, looking longingly at the bowl of gruel.

"Lousy, I ain't dead yet," Grandpopkins said, staring at the blood and gore on the floor.

"Yes, you're still moving and you don't stick any more than usual," Dan said. "So you must be living—living and eating."

"Here, you take this," Grandpopkins said, handing him the bowl. "I don't want it now. Makes me sick to see things like that."

"Yeah, sick," Dan said, gobbling up the Mana. "This is good. Better than our ration."

"And I hear they're eating rice and fresh vegetables in All-Mother India."

"Just a rumor, Jeb. The Peace Guards wouldn't permit it."

"I think the Peace Guards see to it," Grandpopkins said. "I think that's why they're here."

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Dan looked around nervously. "Don't talk like that, man. You never can tell who's listening."

"If they're listening, why do they permit things like that?" Grandpopkins gestured toward the dead youngsters.

"Don't know. Guess they don't want to interfere with anybody's Karma."

"Bullshit," Grandpopkins said. "They want it the way it is so they can run things."

"Those are uncool thoughts, Jeb," Dan said. "You better be careful. There ain't no love in you."

"There sure as hell ain't," Grandpopkins said. "I'm sick to my stomach with love."

"How else you gonna run the world when everybody is stepping on everybody else's toes?" Dan asked, pointing to the bare legs of a girl standing astride them, pressing herself against a youth who was leaning back against a fat woman who was mixing black-market fish heads with her gruel and trying to push away two kids who were playing close-up catch with a six-month-old baby. "How else but with love? You wanna use overkill?"

"No, I don't want to use overkill," Grandpopkins said, "but I wish they wouldn't use over-love either."

He got up and winced at the blast of rock coming from the door of the MacAllison Tribe cubicle. He took two little wads of cotton out of his pocket and stuck them in his ears before going back inside.

A flurry of excitement and voices shouting came over the sound of an acid-rock group doing its noisy thing. Grandpopkins stared at Earth Mother and First Little Pig standing in the middle of the floor struggling over something and yelling at each other.

At the risk of his sanity, he took one wad of cotton out of his ear and listened.

"You dirty, dirty little boy! Where did you get this thing? Where?" Earth Mother was screeching.

"A kid down the corridor gave it to me," First Little Pig said, grabbing at the paperback book she had taken from him. "I been reading it."

"Yes, you've been reading it when you were supposed to be reciting your manta and thinking love thoughts!"

"I'm sick of reciting mantas. I'm sick of sitting in a corner saying, 'Krisna, Om, Siva, Dharma, Buddha, Om,' over and over again. I

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want to find out something and the kid says that book tells something."

"Oh, you up-tight little monster! You're talking like Grandpopkins," Earth Mother said. "Some day the Peace Guards will come take you away."

"They'll have to catch me first," First Little Pig said, snatching the book out of her fingers and darting away in the crowd.

Grandpopkins felt better than he had all day as he headed for his sleeping corner. Maybe there was some hope after all. As long as there were a few kids around like First Little Pig there must be some hope for the world. He chuckled to himself.

But he stopped chuckling when he reached his place. Two blond, long-haired teener girls were waiting for him.

"Groovy, groovy, Grandpopkins," the Bobbsey Twins said. "You're ready for blessed sleep and Earth Mother said for us to cuddle with you tonight to warm your old bones and circulate your blood in the name of Krisna."

Grandpopkins grunted in disgust. Wasn't it bad enough all day? Wasn't it bad enough to have Fredericka after him all day without her seeing to it that he didn't even get to sleep alone?

"Come on, sweet old man, nestle your aching body between our love warm forms," they said together, reaching for him.

Grandpopkins cursed as they dragged him down onto his pad. He cursed but what he really wanted to do was cry.

MORNING came early to the MacAllison Tribe's cubicle. It came with the P.A. system broadcasting direct chants from the Great Gurus in Hashbury. It came with rock music blasting the paint from the walls and with the wild squeal of motorcycle wheels in the corridor and the horrifying sound of metal plowing into flesh.

Grandpopkins dragged himself to his feet, shaking off the clinging arms of the Bobbsey Twins and pushing away the two other Love Children who had piled on top of them during the night. There was a clutching horror in him as he heard that awful sound. All night he had been dreaming pleasant dreams about a time different from this, about people whom the tribe would have thought square and uncool. Those dreams had been produced by the fact that a little boy had defied the Earth Mother in order to read a book. But the sound of Super-Zapper's hog on another kill rampage had shattered those dreams.

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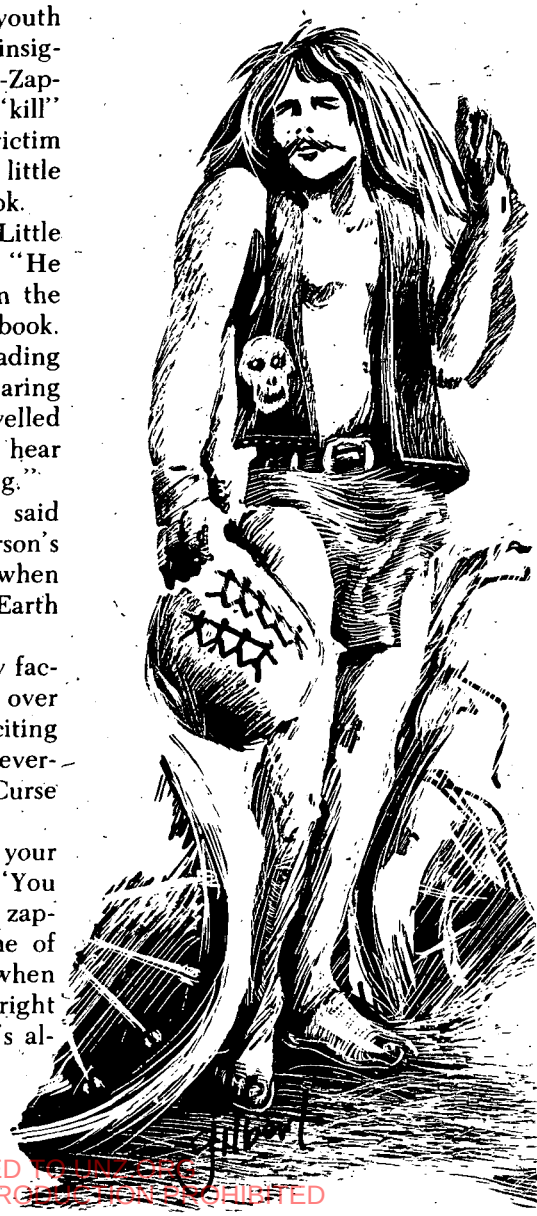
Aching in every joint, he hobbled to the door. A dozen or so laughing, excited people were pointing down the corridor to where another crowd was gathered around the tall, dark-haired youth in German helmet and skull insignia on a denim jacket. Super-Zapper was painting another "kill" hashmark on his cycle. The victim lay nearby—a round-faced little boy clutching a paperback book.

"How about that First Little Pig?" Little Beaver said. "He spent the whole night out in the corridor reading that stupid book. He was still sitting there reading when Super-Zapper came roaring along like Shiva's breath. I yelled at him to run but he didn't hear me 'cause he was concentrating."

Earth Mother smiled and said something about how a person's Karma caught up with them when they didn't listen to their Earth Mother and mocked the gods.

"Shut up, you blasted baby factory!" Grandpopkins yelled over the sound of children reciting morning mantas. "Blast your ever-loving, never-thinking hide! Curse your acid-rotten soul!"

"Grandpopkins, don't blow your cool," Sunflower Sam said. "You get all up tight over a little zapping and you'll bring on one of your attacks. You know that when a guy's on his hog, he's got a right to zap a little. That's how it's always been."



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"Super-Zapper is a free soul," Earth Mother said. "The cyclist gangs are holy."

"Yeah, they're holy," Grandpopkins said, watching the two yellow-robed monks who had appeared from nowhere and were bending over First Little Pig's body. One of them picked up the book with obvious distaste and dropped it into the Universal Disposer nearby. Then both monks congratulated Super-Zapper on his Satori and bent to pick up the smashed child's body and drop it into the disposer.

Grandpopkins watched the end of First Little Pig with a rage building in him such as he hadn't experienced in twenty or thirty years. The boy had been the only one of his numerous tribe whom Grandpopkins had not considered less than human. Now First Little Pig was dead, victim of a kill-crazy freak who was the center of an admiring crowd.

Thinking about Super-Zapper brought back things he hadn't remembered in a long time—how The Land of Love had come into existence, how today's horrible love-sick society had been born out of yesterday, how the world he lived in—no, that he was dying in, thank God—had started with the cyclists. The Hell's Angels and other outlaw cycle gangs—their life style, their unwashed, group-sex, drug-soaked, violence-prone, anarchistic way had been adopted by the youth of America when he had been a child. He remembered the hippies, the yippies, their followers and all the others. All it had taken was the Assassin Time, the City Burning and the Kill Orgy to bring about today born of yesterday. And what would be next?

Yes, it was the cyclists' life style that had produced this culture that he wanted to part from as soon as possible. But first he had something to do. For the first time in twenty years he had a purpose in life. Quickly he slipped the commando knife from beneath his burlap smock and into his right sleeve. The knife would glide into his hand when he was ready. Super-Zapper would kill no more First Little Pigs. Grandpopkins might be dying on his feet but he was still a walking deadly weapon—if he could manage to hobble over to where Super-Zapper stood, surrounded by admirers.

"Where you going, Grandpopkins?" Earth Mother asked. "You haven't said your morning mantas."

Grandpopkins didn't answer. He was saving his breath for the walk down the corridor. He was already wheezing. He had a feel-

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ing the death he longed for was not far off, but even so he would make this walk and the kill at the end of it.

"Super-Zapper! Super-Zapper!" the chicks were screaming admiringly as they milled around the cyclist. "You send us, man! You zap our minds! You turn us on!"

"Excuse me," Grandpopkins said. "Let me through, please. I'd like to touch his jacket. I'm dying and I want to touch the holy Zapper's jacket."

"Of course, Ancient One," a girl said. "Here, let me help you. Your days are short and your need is great."

"Let him through, let him through," a youth called. "The old man is gonna snuff and he wants to feel Super-Zapper's vibes."

"His vibes groove. His vibes are Dharna. Come forward, Old One, and blast your mind with his brilliance."

"I behold his radiance," Grandpopkins said, genuflecting to the best of his ability. "I am sent into orbit by his aura."

"Come forward and touch me, Old One," Super-Zapper said with a giggle. "Your soul will be illuminated."

"Groovy, groovy," Grandpopkins said, bending as though to kiss the extended hand while he slid his long-bladed knife out of his sleeve and balanced it in his hand.

"What is it, old man? What are you holding there?" Super-Zapper demanded, sudden fear in his voice.

"A knife, Super-Zapper," Grandpopkins said in a calm voice that belied his weakness. "I've come to snuff you because you killed First Little Pig and because your kind started this whole thing."

SUPER-ZAPPER screamed and tried to ward off the darting knife blade with his hands. Only a chain mail shirt could have stopped the blade from plunging into his belly. Not withdrawing the knife, the old man twisted and turned his wrist. The cyclist stood for a moment staring at his slashed belly, at the blood pouring onto his shiny cycle. Then he collapsed into admirers' arms.

The crowd went wild. They closed in on Grandpopkins, screeching for his blood.

"He snuffed the Zapper!"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

Hands reached for the old man but Earth Mother pushed

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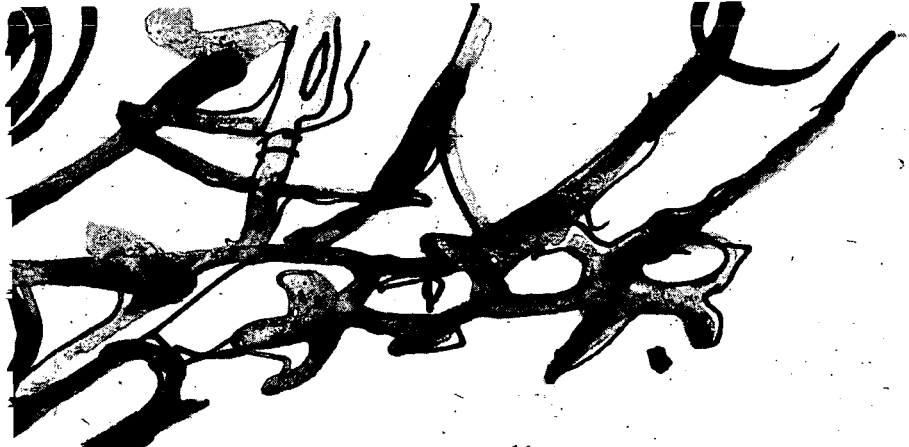

OF DEATH WHAT DREAMS

Keith Laumer

"LEFT hand," the thin man said tonelessly. "Wrist up."

William Bailey peeled back his cuff; the thin man put something cold against it, nodded toward the nearest door.

"Through there, first slab on the right," he said, and turned away.

"Just a minute," Bailey started. "I wanted—"

"Let's get going, buddy," the thin man said. "That stuff is fast."

Bailey felt something stab up under his heart. "You mean—you've already . . . that's all there is to it?"

"That's what you came for, right? Slab one, friend. Let's go."

"But—I haven't been here two minutes—"

"Whatta you expect—organ music? Look, pal," the thin man shot a glance at the wall clock, "I'm on my break, know what I mean?"

"I thought I'd at least have time for . . . for . . ."

"Have a heart, chum. You make

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it under your own power, I don't have to haul you, see?" The thin man was pushing open the door, urging Bailey through into an odor of chemicals and unlive flesh. In a narrow, curtained alcove, he indicated a padded cot.

"On your back, arms and legs straight out."

Bailey assumed the position, tensed as the thin man began fitting straps over his ankles.

"Relax. It's just if we get a little behind and I don't get back to a client for maybe a couple hours and they stiffen up. . . well, them issue boxes is just the one size, you know what I mean?"

A wave of softness, warmness swept over Bailey as he lay back.

"Hey, you didn't eat nothing the last twelve hours?" The thin man's face was a hazy pink blur.

"I awrrr mmmm," Bailey heard himself say.

"OK, sleep tight, paisan . . ." The thin man's voice boomed and faded. Bailey's last thought as the endless blackness closed in was of the words cut in the granite over the portal to the Euthanasia Center:

". . . send me your tired, your poor, your hopeless, yearning to be free. To them I raise the lamp beside the brazen door . . . ."

I

BAILEY'S first thought when he opened his eyes was one of surprise that a girl had taken the thin man's place. She looked young, with a finely chiseled, too-pale face.

"Are you all right?" she asked. Her voice was soft and breathy but with an undernote of strength.

He started to nod, then the wrongness of the scene penetrated. This wasn't the Euthanasia Center. Behind the girl he saw the dun walls and plastic fixtures of a Class Yellow Nine flat. He made an effort to sit up and became aware of a deathly sickness all through his body.

"My chest hurts," he managed to gasp. "What happened? Why am I alive?"

The girl leaned closer. "You were really—inside?"

Bailey thought about it. "I remember going into the cubicle. The attendant gave me a hypo and strapped me down. Then I passed out." His eyes searched the girl's face. "Am I dreaming this?"

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She shook her head without impatience. "I found you in the serviceway behind the Center. I brought you here."

"But I'm supposed to be dead."

"How did you get outside?" the girl asked.

For an instant a ghostly memory brushed Bailey's mind: cold and darkness and a bodiless voice that spoke from emptiness.

"I don't know. I was there—now I'm here."

"Are you sorry?"

Bailey started to answer quickly, paused. "No," he said, wonderingly. "I'm not."

"Then sleep," the girl said.

"WHY?" the girl asked. She sat across from Bailey at the fold-out table, watching as he carefully ate a bowl of Lux-ration soup with real lichen chunks.

"Why did I go?" He made a vague gesture with a thin pale hand. "Everything I wanted to do, everything I tried—it all seemed so hopeless. I was trapped, a Ten-Level Yellow-Tag. There was no future for me, no chance to improve. It was a way out."

"You feel differently now?"

Bailey spoke slowly, as though seeking an answer. "I used to grieve for the old days, when the world wasn't so crowded and so organized. I always told myself what I would have done if I'd lived then. Now I see that was just an easy out. It's always been up to a man to make his own way. I was afraid to try."

"And now you're not afraid?"

"No," Bailey said, surprised. "Why should I be? All that out there—" his gesture was all-encompassing—"is just something built by men. I'm a man, too. I can do what I have to do." He broke off, glancing at the girl. "What about you?" he asked. "Why did you help me?"

"I—know how it is. I almost jumped from the Hudson Intermix—once."

"What changed your mind?"

She lifted her shoulders, frowned. "I don't know. I can't remember. Maybe I lost my nerve."

Bailey shook his head. "No," he said. "You didn't lose your nerve. Helping me took plenty of that. I don't know what the law says about leaving Euthanasia Center via the back door but I left all my papers there. You're harboring a tagless man." He put down

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his spoon and pushed the chair back. "Thanks for everything," he said. "I'll be going now."

"Are you sure you feel well enough?"

"I'm all right. There are things I have to do."

"Where will you go? What will you do?"

"First I'll need money."

"Without your cards, how can you apply for assignment?"

"You're thinking about legal methods," Bailey said. "I'm afraid that's a luxury I can't afford. I'll go where cards don't count."

"You mean—Preke territory?"

"I don't have much choice." Bailey leaned across to touch her hand. "Don't worry about me," he said. "Forget me. At worst, I won't be any worse off than I was, strapped to a slab in the slaughterhouse."

"I still don't know how you got away."

"Neither do I." Bailey hesitated. "Haven't I—seen you before? Met you somewhere?"

She looked long at him, shook her head. "I had the same thought. But no, we've never met."

Bailey nodded, rose. "Never mind the past," he said. "It's what comes next that counts."

BAILEY took the walkaway to the nearest downshaft, rode the crowded car to Threevee Mall. No one paid any visible attention to him as he walked briskly along, past the glare-lit storefronts, through the streaming crowd that bumped and jostled him in perfectly normal fashion. He passed the barred entry to a service ramp, continued thirty feet beyond the green-uniformed Peaceman lounging near it, then flattened himself against the rippling facade of a popshop. A stout man with an angry expression bellied past, trampling Bailey's foot. Bailey stepped out behind him, delivered a sharp kick to the calf of the fat man's left leg, instantly faded back against the wall as the victim whirled with a yell. One windmilling arm caught another pedestrian across the chest. The latter dealt the fat man a return blow to the paunch. In an instant a churning maelstrom of shouting, kicking, punching humanity had developed. Bailey watched until the Greenback arrived, cutting a swath through the crowd with his prod. Then he moved quickly along to the now unguarded gate, jumped to catch its top edge, pulled himself up. There were a few shouts, one ineffective grab

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at his leg by a zealous citizen who staggered back with a bruised chin for his effort. Then Bailey was over, dropping to a wide landing. Without hesitation he started down the dark stairs toward outlaw territory.

THE odor of Four Quarters was the most difficult aspect of that twilit half-world for Bailey to get used to. The shops were shabby antiques, badly lit by primitive fluorescents and garish neon, relics of an age that had bypassed and buried the original city under looming towers of progress. The Prekes—the lawless ones without life permits, work papers or census numbers—seemed not much different from their catalogued and routinized brethren on the levels above, except for the variety of their costumes and a certain look of animal alertness. Bailey moved along the wide street, breathing through his mouth. He strolled for an hour, unmolested, before a tiny, spider-like man with sharp brown eyes materialized from a shadowy doorway ahead.

"New on the turf, hey?" he murmured, falling in beside Bailey. "Papers to move? Top price for a clean ID, Frosh."

"Where can I take a lay on the Vistats?" Bailey asked his new acquaintance.

"Oh, a string man, hah? You're lucky, zek. I'll fence it for you. Just name your lines and give me your card—"

Bailey smiled at the little man. "Do you really get any takers on that one?"

The pinched brown face flickered through several trial expressions, settled on rueful camaraderie. "You never know. Worth a try. But I see you're edged. No hard feelings, zek. What size lay you have in mind? An M? Five M's?"

Bailey slipped the Three-issue watch from his finger, handed it over. "Take me to the place," he said. "If you con me I'll find you sooner or later."

The little man hung back, eyeing the offering. "How do I know you're on the flat?"

"If I'm not, you'll find me later."

A hand like a monkey's darted out and scooped the ring from Bailey's palm. "That's the rax, zek. This way."

Bailey followed his guide along a devious route, skirting the massive piers that supported the city above, into streets even meaner and dirtier than the first, wan in the light that filtered down

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through the grimy plastic skylights spanning the avenues. In a narrow, canyon-like alley, supplementally lit by a lone poly-arc at the corner, the guide pointed with his chin and disappeared.

Bailey stood in an unswept doorway and watched the traffic. A man in a shabby woven-fiber coat passed, giving him a single, furtive glance. A hollow-cheeked woman looked him up and down, snorted, moved on. Across the street a man loitered at a dark window, glancing both ways, then pushed through the unmarked door beside it. A fat woman in shapeless garments emerged, shuffled away. Bailey waited another five minutes until the man had gone, then crossed the street.

The door was locked. He tapped. Silence. He tapped harder. A voice growled, "Beat it. I'm sleeping."

Bailey kept tapping. The door opened abruptly. A swarthy, pockmarked face poked out. The expression on the unshaven features was not friendly. The man looked past Bailey, under him, around him, cursed, started to close the door. Bailey jammed it with his foot.

"I want a job," he said quickly. "You need runners, don't you?"

The swarthy man's foot paused an inch from grinding into Bailey's ankle. His blunt features settled into wariness.

"You're on a bum pitch, Clyde. What I need a runner for?"

"This is a drop shop. You can use me. How about letting me in off the street before somebody gets eyes?"

The door eased back. Bailey slipped through into an odor of nesting mice. By the light from a back hall he saw a clutter of ancient furniture, a battered computer console. Then a meaty hand had caught his tunic front, slammed him back against the wall. A six-inch knife blade glinted under his nose.

"I could cut your heart out."

A garlic-laden threat.

"Sure you could," Bailey said impatiently. "But why take a wipe for nothing?"

"Who told you about me?"

"Look, I just arrived an hour ago. The first drifter I met led me here. Everybody must know this place."

"Bugs send you here?" The hand shook him, rattling his head against the wall.

"For what? The Greenies know all about you. You must have paid bite money, otherwise you wouldn't be operating."

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The knife touched Bailey's throat. "You take some chances, Clyde."

"Put the knife away. You need me—and I need money."

"I need you why?"

"Your biggest problem is transmitting bets and payoff information. You can't use Pubcom or two-way. I have a good memory and I like to walk. For a hundred a week in hard tokens I'll cover all of Mat'n for you."

The silence lengthened. The knife moved away. The grip on Bailey's blouse slackened slightly.

"Bugs got something on you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Why you need money?"

"To buy new papers—and other things."

"You got no cards?"

"Not even an ID."

"How do I know you're not dogging for the Bugs?"

"Get some sense. What would I get out of that?"

The man made a guttural noise and stepped back. "Tell it, Clyde. All of it."

Bailey told. When he had finished the swarthy man rubbed his chin with a sound like a woodrasp cutting pine.

"How'd you do it? Bust out, I mean?"

"I don't know. The girl found me in the alley mumbling about a pain in my chest. My wrists were a little raw, as if I'd forced the straps. After all, it isn't as if they expected anybody to try to leave."

The dark man grunted. "You're scrambled," he said. "But there could be something in it at that. OK, you're on, Jack. Fifty a week—and you sleep in the back."

"Seventy-five—and I eat here, too."

"Push your luck, don't you? All right. But don't expect no lux rations."

"Just so I eat," Bailey said. "I'll need my strength for what I have to do."

II

THE dogeared, seam-cracked maps of the city Bailey's employer supplied dated from a time when the streets had been open to the sky, when unfiltered sunlight had fallen on still-new pavements and

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facades. Two centuries had passed since those wholesome, innocent days, but the charts still reflected faithfully each twist and angle of the maze of streets and alleys. Each night he quartered the city, north to south, riverwall to riverwall. In the motley costume Aroon had given him he passed unremarked in the crowds.

Off-duty, he undertook the cleaning of Aroon's rubbish-filled rooms. After feeding the accumulated debris of decades into a municipal disposer a halfblock from the house, he set about sweeping, scrubbing, polishing the plastron floor and walls until their original colors emerged from under the crusts of age. After that, he procured pen and paper, spent hours absorbed in calculations. Aroon watched, grunted and left him to his own devices.

"You're a funny guy, Bailey," he said after a month of nearly silent observation. "I got to admit at first I didn't know about you. But you had plenty chances to angle and passed 'em. You're smart and a hard worker. You never spend a chit. You work, you eat, you sleep and you scribble numbers. I got no complaint—but what you after, Bailey? You're a rounded guy if I ever see one."

Bailey studied the older man's face. "You and I are going to make some money, Gus," he said.

Aroon looked startled. His thick eyebrows crawled up his furrowed forehead.

Bailey put the question boldly.

"How much do you make a week, booking the stats?"

Aroon frowned. "Hell, you know. Three, four hundred after expenses—if I'm lucky."

"How much do the big boys make? The books?"

"Plenty. But—wait a minute, kid. You ain't getting ideas—"

"They don't rely on luck," Bailey said. "They know. Figure it out for yourself. The play is based on the midnight census readouts. But the figures for production, consumption, the growth indices and vital statistics—they all vary in accordance with known curves."

"Not to me they ain't known. Listen, Bailey, don't start talking chisel to me—"

Bailey shook his head. "Nothing like that. But we do all the work. Why pass all the profits along to them?" He pointed with his head in the general direction of the bookers' present temporary HQ in a defunct hotel half a mile south.

"You slipped your clutch? That's murder—"

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"We won't cut corners on anybody. But tonight we're going to roll our own book."

Aroon's mouth hung open.

"I've worked out the major cycles and enough minor ones to show a profit. It wasn't too hard. I minored in statan, back in my kid days."

"Wise up, kid," Aroon growled. "What do I use for capital?"

"We'll start out small. We won't need much—just a little flash money to cover margins. I've got three hundred to contribute. I'd estimate another seventeen hundred ought to do it."

Aroon's tongue touched his lips. "This is nuts. I'm a drop man, not a book."

"So now you're a book. You already have the work list, your steady customers. We'll just direct a few lays into our private bank, on these lines." Bailey passed across a sheet of paper. It was filled with columns of figures.

"I can't take no chance like this," Gus breathed. "What if I can't cover? What if—"

"What have you got to lose, Gus? This?" Bailey glanced around the room. "You could have a Class-Three flat, wear issue 'alls, eat at the commess—if you want up there." He glanced ceilingward. "You picked Preke country instead. Why? So you could lock into another system—a worse one?"

"I got enough," Gus said hoarsely. "I get along."

"Just once," Bailey said. "Take a chance. Take it, or face the fact that you spend the rest of your life in a one-way dead-end."

Gus swallowed hard. "You really think—"

"I think it's a chance. A good chance."

For long seconds Aroon stared into Bailey's face. Then he hit the table with his fist. He swore. He rose to his feet, a big, burly man with sweat on his face.

"I'm in, Bailey," he croaked. "Them guys ain't no better than me and you. And if a man can't ride a hunch once in his life, what's he got anyway, right?"

"Right," Bailey said. "Now better make some cash ready. It's going to be a busy night."

FOR the first three hours it was touch and go. They paid off heavily on the twenty-one hours readout, showed a modest recoup on

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the twenty-two, cut deeply into their tiny reserve at twenty-three.

"We ain't hacking it, kid," Aroon muttered, wiping at his bald forehead with a yard-square handkerchief. "At this rate we go under on the next read."

"Here's a revised line," Bailey said. "One of the intermediate composites is cresting. That's what threw me off."

"If we pull out now we can pay off and call it square."

"Play along one more hour, Gus."

"We'll be in too deep. We can't cover."

"Ride it anyway. Maybe we can."

"I'm nuts," Gus said. "But okay, one more pass."

On the midnight reading the pot showed a profit of three hundred and thirty-one Q's. Again Aroon proposed getting out but half-heartedly. At one hundred the stake more than doubled. At two, in spite of a sharp wobble in the GNP curve they held their own. At three, a spurt sent them over the two-thousand mark. By dawn the firm of Aroon and Bailey had a net worth of forty-one hundred and sixty-one credit units, all in hard tokens.

"I got to hand it to you, Bailey," Aroon said in wonderment, spreading the bright-colored plastic chips on the table with a large, hairy hand. "A month's take—in one night."

"This is a drop in the bucket, Gus," Bailey said. "I just wanted to be sure my formulas worked. Now we really start operating."

Gus looked wary. "What's that mean? More trouble?"

"I've been keeping my eyes open since I've been here in Four Quarters. It's a pretty strange place when you stop to think about it—a whole subculture living outside the law, a refuge for criminals and misfits. Why do the Greenies tolerate it? Why don't they stage a raid, clean out the Prekes once and for all, put an end to the lawbreakers and the rackets? They could do it any day they wanted to."

Gus looked uncomfortable. "Too much trouble, I guess. We keep to our own. We live off the up-graders' scraps—"

"Uh-uh," Bailey said. "They live off ours—some of them, even at the top."

"Crusters and Dooses—live off Prekes?" Gus wagged his head. "Your drive is slipping, Bailey."

"Who do you think backs the big books? There's money involved—several million every night. Where do you think it goes?"

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"Into the bookers' pockets, I guess. What about it? I don't like this kind of talk. It makes me nervous."

"The big books want you to be nervous," Bailey said. "They don't want anyone asking questions, rocking the boat. But let's ask some anyway. Where does the money go? It goes upstairs, Gus. That's why they let us alone, let us spend our lives cutting each other's throats—so they can bleed off the cream. It's good business."

"You're skywriting, Bailey."

"Sure, I admit it's guesswork. But I'm betting I'm right. And if I am we can cut ourselves as big a slice as we have the stomach for."

"Look, we're doing okay. We play small enough maybe they don't pay no attention—"

"They'll pay attention. Don't think we're the first to get ideas. Staying small is the one thing we can't do. It will be a sure tip-off that we're just a pair of mice in the woodwork. We have to work big, Gus. It's the only bluff we've got."

"Big—on four M." Gus stared scornfully at the chips he had been fondling.

"That's just seed," Bailey said. "Tonight we move into the big time."

"How?"

"We borrow."

Gus stared. "You nuts, Bailey? Who—"

"That's what I want you to tell me, Gus. Here." He slid a sheet of paper across the table. "Write down the name of every man in the quarters who might be good for a few hundred. I'll take it from there."

THE dark-eyed man sat with his face in shadow, his long-fingered hands resting on the table before which Bailey stood, waiting.

"Why," he asked in a soft, sardonic drawl, "would I put chips in a sucker play like that?"

"Maybe I made a mistake," Bailey said loudly. "I thought you might want a crack at some important money. If you'd rather play it small and safe I'll be on my way."

"You talk big for a nothing from no place."

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"It's not where I'm from—it's where I'm going," Bailey said offhandedly.

"You think you're at the bottom now?" the man snarled. "You can drop another six feet—into dirt."

"What would that prove?" Bailey inquired. "That you're too big a man to listen to an idea that could make you rich?"

"I take chances when the odds are right—"

"Then take one now. Buy in an M's worth—or half an M. You'll have it back tomorrow with interest. If you don't—I guess you'll know what to do about it."

The man leaned back. The light glinted from his deepset eyes. He rubbed the side of his beaked nose. "Yeah. I guess I'd think of something at that. Let me get this straight. Aroon is selling slices of a book that will pay twenty-five per cent for twenty-four hours' action?"

"That's tonight. Investors only. Tomorrow's too late."

"How do I know you don't hit the lifts with the bundle?"

"You think I could make it—with all the eyes that will be watching me?"

"Who else is in?"

"You're the first. I've got a lot of ground to cover before sunset, Mr. Farb. Are you in or out?"

The hawk-nosed man touched his fingertips together, scratched his chin with a thumb.

"I'll go four M," he said. "Better have five ready by sunset tomorrow."

Bailey accepted the stack of gold chips. "You've made a smart move, Mr. Farb. Tell your man to tail me from close enough to move in if some sharpie tries to play rough."

Six hours and forty-one calls later, Bailey returned to the Aroon pad with twenty-six M in chips. His reluctant partner goggled, hastened to sweep the loot into a steel box.

"It's safe," Bailey said, sinking wearily into a chair. "We bought plenty of protection along with the cash. Every investor on the list has a man or two out there keeping an eye on his stake."

"Bailey," Aroon's voice had a faint quaver. "What if we bomb out? They won't leave enough of us to tie a tag on."

"Then we'd better not bomb out. Just give me time for a cup of feen and we'll start booking them."

Aroon sweated heavily during the first hour of the night's play.

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Of the ten thousand or so that was the normal wager on the twenty-three-hundred-hour readouts, Bailey diverted two to the private book, scattering the bets so as to disturb the normal pattern as little as possible.

"The longer we can keep the big boys off our necks at this stage, the better," he pointed out. "We'll feed them enough to keep 'em happy until we've built up steam."

"They're bound to tip after a while," Gus protested.

"We'll be ready. Jack the ante to thirty per cent next hour."

By midnight the traffic had risen to over twenty M in wagers on the numbers on the big board; customers, encouraged by the normally high rate of payoff, were reinvesting their takes. Aroon wagged his heavy head as he paid out line after line.

"We ain't doing so good," he muttered, watching the digits flicker on the monitor screen. "I never paid off like this in six years of drop work."

"I'm keeping the balance as sweet as I can and still showing a profit," Bailey reassured him. "We must build a following fast."

"We're barely clearing enough to pay off our backers."

"That's right. But I'm banking that they'll stay on for another whirl. We're going to need all the siders we can get when the squeeze comes."

In the following hours the pot grew to fifty M—to seventy. Now Aroon was booking a full half of the offers on the new ledger.

"It can't go on long," he groaned. "We're cutting too big a slice. Bailey, we ought to take it slow, not make a wave—"

"Just the opposite. We're running a bluff, Gus. That means, show all the muscle you can beg, borrow or fake up out of foam rubber."

By dawn the new book had turned a grand total of almost half a million in bets, for a payoff of sixty-seven per cent and a net profit of forty thousand Q's.

"We're clear," Aroon announced in wondering tones after the count. "We can square our stakers and clean seven and a half—" He broke off as a sharp sound came from the locked street door—a sound of breaking metal. The door jumped inward and three men came through without triggering the defense circuits. Gus came to his feet, started to bluster, but the small man leading the trio showed him the gleam of a slug pistol.

"Easy, Gus," Bailey said in a relaxed tone. "Let 'em snoop."

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Bailey and Aroon stood silent as the three cruised the room, aiming detector instruments at the walls, the floor, the ceiling.

"Clean," the two underlings reported. "There ain't no tap here, Buncey."

"That's good for you small-timers," the man called Buncey said in a soft tone. "If you were bleeding the wire you'd wake up a long way from here—only you wouldn't wake up. The way it is, we just lift the take and close you down. You're lucky, see? Vince, Greaseball here will tell you where he keeps the loot."

"No, he won't," Bailey said in a level tone. Buncey turned to look him up and down. He dandled the gun on his palm.

"Use it or put it away," Bailey said. "We don't bluff."

"Kid, listen—" Gus started.

"You tired of breathing?" the small man inquired softly, curling his fingers around the weapon.

"Don't play dumb," Bailey said. "You've been covered like a bashful bride ever since you came in here."

"Yeah?" the small man said tightly. "Maybe. But I could still blow you down, junior."

"Does your boss want to spend three chips for a couple of front men?"

"Our boss doesn't like small-time competish."

Bailey showed him a crooked grin. "Dream on, Buncey. We booked in a half-million tonight. Does that look like small time?"

"You're cutting your own throat, cheapie—"

"There won't be any throats cut," Bailey said. "Wake up—there's been a change. Our outfit is in—and we're not settling for small change. Our backers are taking a full share."

Buncey snorted. "You're showing your cuff, dummy. The play's backed from the top—all the way up. And it's a closed corporation, all tied up, a tight operation. You got no backers. Your bluff is bust."

"There's more," Bailey said. "Sure, your Cruster bosses have always cut the pie their way. But as of tonight there's one more slice. And this one stays below decks, where it belongs."

"What are you pulling?" Buncey looked uneasy. "There's not a bundle under the floor that could roll a full book."

"Not until now," Bailey said. "The syndicate changes that."

"Syndicate?"

"That's right. Every operator in Mat'n is with us."

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"You're lying," Buncey snapped. "No two Preke grifters could work together for longer than it takes to mug a zek on a string lay." He brought up the gun with a sure motion. "I'm calling your bet, little man."

He stiffened at a sound from the back hall. A tall, lean man appeared, glancing casually about. He nodded at Aroon, ignoring the gunmen.

"I liked the night's play," Farb said easily. "I'm plowing my cut back in. So are the rest of us." He dropped a stack of fully charged cash cards on the table. Only then did he turn a look on the man called Buncey. "You can go now," he said. "Better put the iron away. We don't want any killing."

Buncey slowly pocketed his gun. "You Prekes are serious," he said. "You think you can buck topside?"

"We know we can as long as we're not too greedy," Bailey said. "Try to strongarm us and the whole racket blows sky-high. Concede us our ten per cent of the action and nobody's hurt."

"I'll pass the word. If you're bagging air, better look for a hole—a deep one. These things can be checked."

"Check all you want," Farb said. "We like the idea of a little home industry. We're behind it all the way."

After the three had left, Gus slumped into a rumpsprung chair with a guttural sigh.

"Bailey, you walked the thin edge just now. How'd you know they wouldn't call you?"

"They're gamblers," Bailey said. "The percentages were against it." He looked at Farb. "You meant what you said?"

Farb nodded, the slow of honest greed in his eyes. "I don't know where you came from, Bailey, or why—but you worked a play that I wouldn't have given a filed chit for twelve hours ago. Keep it up. You'll have all the weight you want behind you."

III

THREE months later Bailey told Aroon he was leaving.

"The operation's all yours, Gus. I've got what I need. It's time to move on."

"I can't figure you, kid," the older man said, shaking his heavy head. "You take chances that no other guy would touch with a

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chip rake—when they pay off, you bow out. Why not stay on? On your split you could live like a king."

"Sure I could, here. But there are things that need doing that take more than a fat credit balance. I need a tag to start with. Can you fix it?"

Gus grunted. "It'll cost you a slice of that pile you've been sitting on."

"That's what it's for."

"Class Three Yellow about right?"

Bailey shook his head. "Class One Blue."

"Are you outa your mind, Bailey?" Aroon yelled. "You can't bluff your way Topside."

"Why not? I bluffed my way into Preke territory."

"Your roll won't carry you a week up there."

"All I need is the price of admission."

"Face it, Bailey. There's more to it than loot. You don't look like a Cruster, you don't act like one. How could you? Those babies have all the best from the day they're born, the best food, the best education, the best training. They have their own way of walking and talking, sniffing flowers, making up to a frill. They've got class where it shows and they can back it up. You can't fake it."

"Who said anything about faking it, Gus? You must know the name of a reliable tapelegger."

"A print man?" Aroon's voice had automatically dropped to a whisper. "Bailey, that ain't demi-chit stuff. Touch a wrong strip and it's a wiping rap."

"If I'm caught."

"And anyway—a good tech line is worth a fortune. You couldn't touch even a Class-Two tape job for under a quarter million."

"I don't want a tech education," Bailey said. "I want a background cultural fill-in—the kind they give a Cruster after a brain injury or wipe therapy."

"I guess there's no need my asking why you want to load your skull with fancy stuff you'll never use, that'll never buy you a night's flop?" Gus said hoarsely.

"Nope. Can you put me on to a right man?"

"If that's the way you want it."

"It's the way it's got to be for where I've got to go."

Aroon nodded heavily. "I owe you that much—and a lot more. You shook this whole lousy setup to bedrock, something that need-

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ed doing for a long time." He rose. "Come on. I'll take you there."

"I'll go alone, Gus. Just give me the name and address and I'm on my way."

"You don't waste much time, do you, kid?"

"I don't have much time to waste."

"What is it you got to do that's eating at you?"

Bailey frowned. For a moment an image rose before him: a feminine face, indistinct, delicate-featured, hauntingly familiar. A voice, speaking urgently. A memory, half-grasped, fading.

"I don't know. I just know the time is short for me to do it."

IT WAS a narrow, high-ceilinged room, walled with faded rose and gold paper, furnished with glossy dark antiques perched around the edge of a carpet from which the floral pattern was almost worn away. An elaborate chandelier, fitted with ancient flame-shaped incandescent bulbs, hung from a black-iron chain. Tarnished gilt lettering winked from the cracked leather spines of books in a glass-fronted case. The man who surveyed Bailey from the depths of a curve-legged wing chair was lean, withered, with a face like a fallen souffle. Only his eyes moved, assessing his customer.

"Do you have any idea what you're asking?" he inquired in a voice like dry leaves stirred by the wind. "Do you imagine that by absorbing from an illegally transcribed cephalotape the background appropriate to a gentleman of birth and breeding, that you will be magically transformed from your present lowly state?"

"Can you supply what I want or can't you?" Bailey asked patiently.

"I can supply a full Class-One socio-cultural matrix, yes," the old man snapped. "As to providing a magical entrée into high places—"

"If what you've got to offer won't fill the bill—I'll be on my way." Bailey got to his feet. The old man rose quickly, stood stoop-backed, eyeing him.

"Why aren't you content to absorb a useful skill, a practical knowledge of a salable trade? Why these grandiose aspirations to a place you can never fill?"

"That's my business," Bailey said. "Yes or no?"

The old man's puckered face tightened. "You're a fool," he said. "Come with me."

In a back room Bailey took a seat in a worn, leather-covered re-

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clining chair. The tapelegger clucked and muttered to himself as he attached the electrodes to Bailey's skull, referring frequently to the dials on the wheeled cart beside him. As he pressed buttons Bailey felt the stirrings and tinglings of the neuro-electric currents induced within his brain by the teaching machine.

"Make no mistake," the old man told him. "The material you receive here will be in no way inferior to that offered in the most exclusive Universities. My prints were coded direct from the masters filed at HEW Central. Once assimilated, a bootleg education is objectively indistinguishable from any other."

"I'm counting on it," Bailey said. "That's why I'm paying you fifty M."

"A tiny fraction of the value of what is encoded here." The 'legger weighed the reel on his palm. "The essence of a lifetime of cultured ease. This particular Trace was made by Aldig Parn, Blue One, the critic and collector. You'll have a fabulous grounding in the arts. Parn was also a Distinguished Master at the game called *Reprise*. You'll acquire it all—and much, much more. It's not been edited, you see. It's all as it came from his brain, even to personal tastes and mannerisms, all those subtleties and nuances of culture which are cut from authorized tapes."

"If it's as good as that, why sell at all? Why not use it yourself?"

"Why?" the print man snapped. "So that I could become even more acutely aware of the horrors of life in a petrified society? I've too much education already. One day I'll present myself at Unicen for voluntary wipe and begin again as a pink-tag, crude-labor gangman. The solace of nepenthe."

"That's not much of a sales talk," Bailey said.

"I'm not urging you to buy. I'd recommend a limited tech indoc, sufficient to guarantee you a yellow tag."

"Never mind. I won't hold you responsible. Just be sure you watch those meters. I don't want a burned cortex for my trouble."

BAILEY had had headaches before but nothing like this.

"You'll live," the 'legger said briskly. "It was you who insisted on haste. You took it surprisingly well. Your metabolic index never dropped below point eight. Rest for a few days avoid any creative mental activity, problem solving. I don't want any blankages to mar the imprint."

Bailey muttered and lay back in the chair. Through the thudding

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pain, a kaleidoscopic whirl of images danced. Phantom voices rang in his ears against the complex shapes of abstract patterns.

"I don't feel any smarter," he said. "Are you sure it took?"

The old man snorted. "Of course you're no more intelligent than when I began. But you'll find your mind is imprinted with a very great mass of new data. Of course, the current-status portion will be out of date by some years: the fads, catch-phrases, in-group gossip of the moment. After all, I don't have access to the daily addenda. But that will hardly be of importance, I imagine."

Bailey ignored the implied question. He paid off, made his way to the loft he had rented as temporary quarters. On the third day the headache was gone. Gingerly, then, he probed at his memory. Slowly at first, then more swiftly, a mass of data-concepts flowed into his awareness as the taped information swam into focus: the proper mode of address to a magistrate in a situation of formality degree five; the correct instruction to a groom when requiring disengagement from an awkward social context; the control layout of the Monojag Sport Twin, model 900; the precise gait appropriate to an unescorted entrance to a public dining salon, early evening, formality three; the names of the leading *erotistes* of the moment; the entry codes to clubs, the proper wardrobe combinations for this situation and that, the forty-one positions and three hundred and four strokes of the *katchu-gat*, the membership ritual for the Fornax Club. . .

"Good enough," he murmured. He dressed and left the loft, headed for the address he had purchased for an extra M from the tapelegger.

IT WAS an unprepossessing front of ancient, natural stone, a hideous dull purple in color, with steep steps and a corroded iron railing. He rapped, waited. The door was opened by a small, bandy-legged, jug-eared man with a shiny scalp and the face of an intelligent rhesus.

"Yes?" the man demanded, wiping at his face with the towel draped around his stringy neck.

Bailey showed a cred-card, almost fully charged.

"I want to see Goldblatt."

"Looking at him." The small man glanced up and down Bailey's slight frame. "Rehab case?" he asked doubtfully.

"No. I want a Maxpo course."

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The man jumped as if he had been jabbed in the kidneys. "You a kidder, mister? What you think this is, Doose Center? I run a quiet house of physical fitness here, strictly on the flat—"

"I've got ten M's that say differently," Bailey cut in softly.

Goldblatt stared. "Out," he said firmly. He put a surprisingly sinewy hand against Bailey's chest. "You have the wrong Goldblatt."

Bailey took his other hand from his pocket, showed the glossy blue of the One Category tag. "Don't worry, it's faked," he said as the gym operator jerked his hand back. "I'm showing it to you to convince you I'm in no position to call in the Bugs. I can pay for what I want."

Goldblatt took a fold of Bailey's tunic in his fingers and pulled him inside, closed the door quickly, hustled him through a frowsty room where a pair of sweating men pulled listlessly at spring-loaded apparatus.

In a small office he asked, "What's this all about, mister?"

Bailey eased half a dozen full-charge cash cards from his pocket, fanned them out. "These tell it all," he said.

Goldblatt's frown lingered on the green- and blue-edged plastics.

"You said—Maxpo? What makes you think I can help you?" He shot a sharp look over Bailey's spare frame. "Or that you could handle the gaff if I could, which I'm not saying I can?"

"How I handle it is up to me." Bailey placed the blue tag on top of the cred-cards, offered the stack. "You hold them until the job's done."

Goldblatt put up a hand, made a pushing motion. "No. Don't show me a fixed tag, mister." His hand reversed, became an open palm. "But maybe I could take a retainer while we talk about it."

Bailey handed over the cards. "I want to start today," he said. "How long will it take?"

"HOW long it takes," Goldblatt said half an hour later, "depends on a couple things. First, how good the equipment is." He slapped the curving metal case, like a streamlined coffin, that rested on a stand in the surprisingly clean and well-lit basement room. "And I've got the best. Private custom job, less than five years old, best circuitry a man could ask for—except no blanking circuit. You take it cold. That's how I got it cheap."

"How long?" Bailey repeated the question.

"Second, what we got to work with," Goldblatt continued, un-

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ruffled. He rubbed his hands together. "Frankly, my friend, you offer a man a challenge." He frowned happily at Bailey's bare ribs, reached out to squeeze the thin arm above the elbow. "You look like about what we call a three: minimum normal range, about point four musculature, probably no better'n a five vascular rating, same for osteo—"

"I understand it's a fast process," Bailey said. "Can you do it in a week?"

The trainer's mouth snapped open. He wagged his head in wonderment. "The ideas some people got," he said. "Forget it, mister. A week? In a week maybe you can see the first results. What you think a Maxpo is, some kind of magic trick? It's pain. Pain that will burn your heart out. Not every man can take it—not even most men. And frankly, you don't look to me like one of the tough ones. Maybe better we talk a standard toning course, two weeks and you feel like a new man."

"Maxpo or nothing," Bailey said. "And in minimum time."

"You know how it works, mister?" Goldblatt turned to the tank, poked a button. The top slid back, exposing a padded interior of complex shape, fitted with numerous wide web straps with polished buckles.

"The principle," Bailey responded instantly, "is that of selective electronically triggered isometric and isotonic contraction, coupled with appropriately neuro-synaptic stimulation and coordinated internal physiochemical environmental control. The basal somatic rhythms are encoded, brought into a phased relationship and—"

"You know plenty fancy words, bub, I'll give you that," Goldblatt said wonderingly. "But what it works out to is I put a microfilament tap into your spinal cord—right where it leaves the skull. We use the trial-and-error method for coding the motor nerves. It hurts. When I finish, all I have to do is push a button and the muscle it's wired to contracts—max contraction, more than you could trigger with the voluntary nervous system. Once I've got you wired, I slap you in the frame and strap you up rigid. The frame is articulated, so you get isotomic work along with the 'metrics. Then I work you over like one of them guys in a torture chamber—know what I mean? You'll come out of it screaming for mercy, every muscle in your body yelling for help. You'll turn black and blue all over. This goes on for a week. Then it gets worse." He shook his head. "Like I said, not many fellows can take it."

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"How long?"

"Give yourself a break, mister. A few times a year I sell a tank job, not a max but just whatever somebody needs, like a demo player is slowing down, he needs toning up fast; or some of these specialty show people, after a long layoff. And even at that—"

"How many hours a day do I spend inside?"

"A day?" Goldblatt barked. "You work day and night—that's if you're talking minimum time. But that's for lab cases, theory stuff."

"We'll test the theory."

"You must be in some kind of hurry, mister."

"That's right. And we're wasting time."

Goldblatt nodded heavily. "It's your bones that'll get bent, my friend, not mine. All right, strip down and I'll run you across the 'tab monitor and see what we got to work with."

THE insertion of the hair-fine electrodes took three hours—three uncomfortable hours of probing in sensitive flesh with sharp-pointed metal, alternated with tingling shocks that made obscure muscles jump and quiver. At the end of it, Bailey touched the coin-sized plastic disc nestled against the base of his skull and winced.

"That's the easy part," Goldblatt said cheerfully. "Now we start the hard work. You know, it's funny," he rambled on as he strapped his victim in position. "They invented this device to take the will power out of physical training. What they forgot was it still takes will power to climb in under the straps, knowing what's coming."

"If you scare me to death, you don't collect," Bailey said. "Those cards are no good without my prints."

Goldblatt grinned. "Ready?" he asked. "Here we go."

Bailey felt his right thigh twitch. He yelled as a full-fledged cramp locked to the *rectus femoris*—the name popped into his mind—like a red-hot clamp. The limb strained against the straps, quivering.

". . . four seconds, five seconds, six seconds," Goldblatt counted off. Abruptly the pressure was gone. The pain receded.

"Hey," Bailey started—and yelled as his left leg jerked against the restraint. Six more endless seconds passed. Bailey lay gasping as a lever moved, flexing his knee to a new position.

"Cry all you want to," Goldblatt said cheerfully. "This baby

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works over three hundred separate muscles, max contraction, three positions. How you like it, hah? Ready to get some sense now and settle for a toner like I said to begin with?"

Bailey gritted his teeth against the rubber bite protector and endured another spasm.

"Whatever you say, my friend," Goldblatt sighed. "Here we go again . . ."

"ONLY two and a half hours?" Bailey inquired weakly. "It seemed like two years."

"You build muscle by tearing down muscle," the trainer said. "You just tore down a couple billion cells and that hurts. But the body's a fast worker. She rebuilds—and then we tear down again. So she works faster. But she hurts. She hurts all the time. For a week. For a month. Max job? Make that three months."

"That's cutting it fine," Bailey said. "Can't you rush it any?"

"Sure—if you want to sleep in the tank," Goldblatt said sardonically.

"If that's what it takes."

"Are you serious? But I don't need to ask, do I? You're a man that's driven if I ever saw one. What is chewing you, young fellow? You have a lot of life ahead of you. Slow down."

"I can't," Bailey said. "Let's get started on what comes next."

In the third week Bailey, out of the tank for his alter-hourly session in the treadcage, paused to look at himself in the mirror. His face was gaunt, knobbed below the jawline with unfamiliar lumps of muscle; his neck was awkwardly corded; his shoulders swelled in sinewy striations above a chest which seemed to belong to someone else.

"I look wrong," he said. "Misshapen. No symmetry. Out of balance."

"Sure, sure. What do you expect, to start with? Some sectors respond quicker, some were in better shape. Don't worry. First we go for tone, then bulk, then definition, then balance. You're doing swell. We start coordination and dynamics next. Another sixty days and you'll look like you were born under that blue tag." He rubbed a hand over his head, eyeing Bailey. "If it wasn't so crazy, I'd think maybe that's the way you were thinking," he said.

"Don't think about it, Hy," Bailey said. "Just keep the pressure on."

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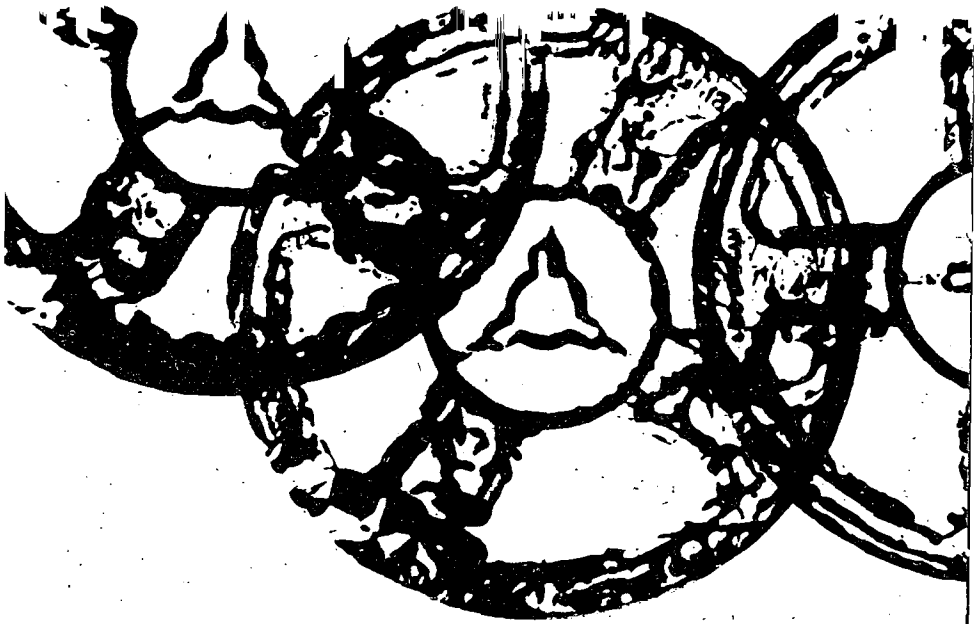

ON THE eighty-fifth day Hy Goldblatt looked at Douglas Bailey and wagged his head in exaggerated wonder.

"If I didn't see it myself I would never have believed it was the same man."

Bailey turned this way and that, studying himself in the wall mirror. He walked a few steps, noting the automatic grace of his movements, the poise of his stance, the unconscious arrogance of his posture, the way he held his head.

"It'll do, Hy," he said. "Thanks for everything."

"Where you going now? Why not stay on, help out in the gym? Look, I need an assistant."

"Pressing business," Bailey said. "What do you know about the Apollo Club?"

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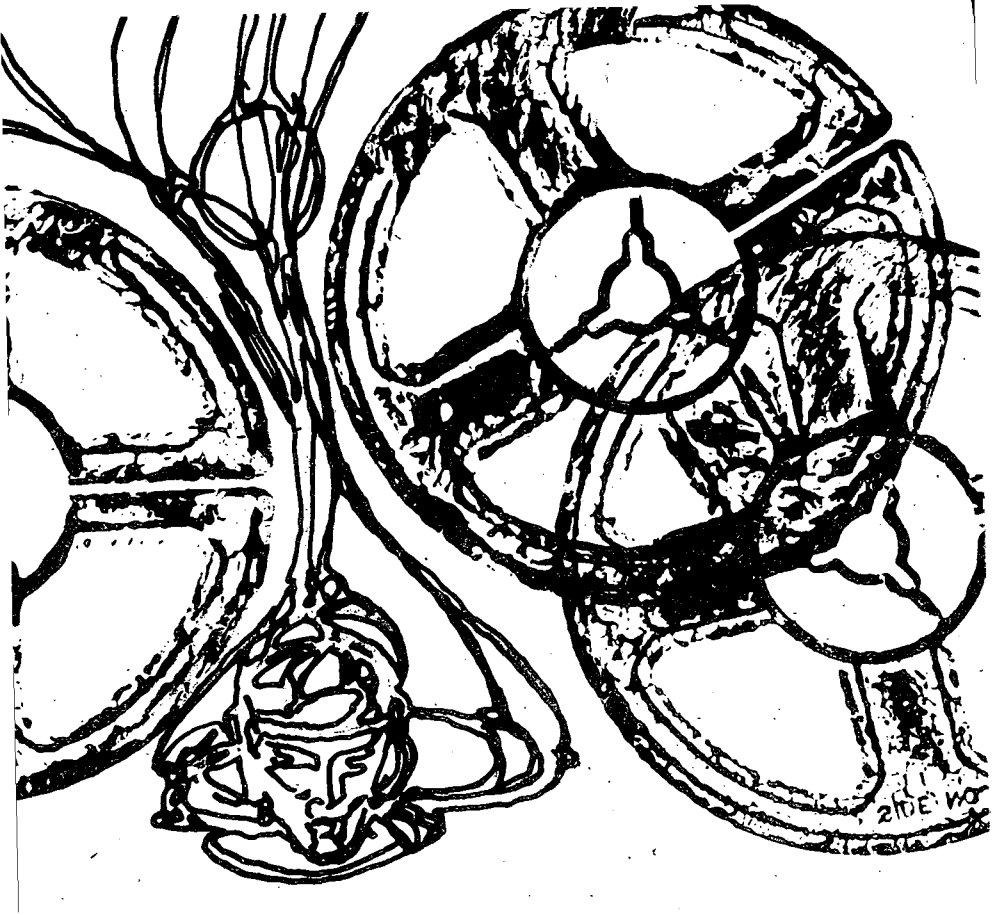

Goldblatt frowned. "I was in the place once, mat man for a cross-class match. Lousy. Fancy place, fancy people. You wouldn't like working there."

"I might like being a member."

Goldblatt stared at him. "You really think you got a chance, Dutch tag and all?"

Bailey turned, gave the trainer an imperious glare. "Are you questioning me?" he asked in a steely tone. Goldblatt stiffened; then he grinned wryly at Bailey's mocking smile.

"Maybe you do at that," he said.

BAILEY devoted the next few hours to ablutions: a vacuum-and-pressure steam bath, mani- and pedicure, depilation, tonsure, skin

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toning and UV, bacterial purge. Then he turned his attention to costume.

The clothes he picked were secondhand but they had been hand-cut from woven fabric, rich and elegant. Bailey had bought them from a doddering ancient whose hand shook with *paralysis agitans* until the moment when the scissors touched the cloth.

"You don't see goods like this any more," the old tailor stated in his frail whisper. "Heat-seal plastics, throwaways, trash. Nothing like this."

He wagged his hairless skull, making ugly soapstone marks on the tunic against Bailey's chest.

"Where'd you get them?"

"Found on a corpse," the tailor said. "They brought them to me. Dead men's clothes. Bad business. Man should be decently buried. But they don't even get that nowadays, eh? Into the converter. Save the chemicals. As if a man was no more than a heap of fertilizer. No respect. That's what's gone wrong. No respect."

"How far out of the current style is this outfit?"

"Cutting like this doesn't go out of style," the dodderer said sharply. "People don't understand that. Trash, yes; flash today, junk tomorrow. But quality—real quality—it endures. In this clothing you could be at home any place. Nobody could fault you. Of the finest."

IV

IT WAS almost dusk when Bailey left the shop, swinging his swagger stick, his newly altered garments snugged to his new body with a feel he had never known before. People on the sidewalks eyed him aslant and slid aside. In a dark shop with a smell of conspiracy he made a purchase.

Once out of sight on the utility stair he clipped his bogus blue tag in place, checked his credit code: a charge of eight and a half M remained on the plastic: enough to live for a couple of years belowdecks, he reflected—or to buy an adequate evening up above.

Attached to the steel gate barring access to Threevee Mall was a yard-high sign reading DEATH PENALTY FOR TRESPASS. Bailey pounded on it. In less than a minute the big grill slid back to reveal a pair of Greenbacks, slammers leveled at belt-buckle

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height. Their jaws sagged as Bailey strolled through the forbidden gate.

"It's all right, leftenant," he said to the corporal and pushed the still-aimed gun barrel aside with a well-groomed finger. "Clear a path for me, there's a good fellow."

The Peaceman made a gobbling sound. "B—how—why—" He recovered a portion of his wits with an effort. "M'lord, that gate is interdicted—"

"And a good thing, too." Bailey's eye flicked to the man's tag number. "I'll mention your prompt action to father—" he smiled with just the proper degree of guile. "In another connection, of course. Wouldn't do for his Lordship to guess where I've been amusing myself. Shall we go now? I reek of the Quarters." Without waiting for assent, he started toward the wall of gaping passers-by. At a yell from the Greenbacks, they faded aside. Smiling a negligent smile, Bailey preceeded his escort toward the lighted entry to the high-speed lift marked BLUE ONE.

THE Peaceman cleared half a dozen passengers from the car to make room for Bailey. As the lift rocketed upward he felt their eyes on him, hostile but cautious. At each intermediate level people crowded off against the flow of others crowding on—but the space around Bailey remained clear. No one jostled him. A pair of Peacemen made a swift tag check at the final stop before the car entered Doose territory. They evicted a protesting burgher with an overdate visa, gave Bailey and one other man respectful finger-touches to their helmet visors. Nearly empty now, the car continued upward. By the fourth stop, the only remaining passengers were Bailey and the other man the police had saluted. The latter was tall, erect, silver-haired, ruddy of skin, dressed in austere gray with silver piping. He glanced not quite at Bailey's eyes, murmured words which at first Bailey failed to understand: a formalized greeting, proper for strangers of approximately equal rank, indicating a degree of tolerant impatience with a shared inconvenience. Bailey made the appropriate response. The tall man's eyes flickered over him more boldly. He touched the silvered panel on the wall. The car sighed to a stop. Bailey tensed.

"Special party. Tonight, twenty-four-thirty, Danzil's terrace. Kindred spirits. *Do* come." The words emerged in a breathless rush. Suddenly Bailey felt himself blushing as he understood the impli-

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cations of the invitation. Muscles jumped in his arms as his fists tensed . . .

Abruptly he was remembering a face, a dream-image of utter desirability, eyes that held him, a soft voice, steadying him, trusting him.

Douglas . . . remember all that depends on you . . . the thing you have to do . . . that we have to do together . . .

Bailey drew a breath, forced a relaxed smile to his face.

"What a pity," he said easily. "I'm committed to some sort of rummage at Balai's. Tedious, but—" As he spoke, another idea formed. "Of course, earlier on . . ."

"My club," the gray man said quickly.

"What club would that be?"

"Trident," the tall man said eagerly. "Willowinter. And of course, Apollo."

"I've never seen the Apollo," Bailey said roguishly.

"It's not the Formax," his new acquaintance said, rolling his eyes. "But it has its charms."

"Suppose we say—at twenty-two hours?"

"Splendid."

The tall man pressed the plate; the car slid upward. His eyes held on Bailey, glistening. At the next intermediate he stepped off, turned in parting. He shivered.

"The excitement," he hissed. "Don't be late—and if you should be early, call for my man Wilf—"

The door closed on his eager expression. Bailey grimaced as the car shot upward, to halt half a minute later at Level Blue One.

TWO impeccably groomed attandants—Special Detail Peacemen, Bailey knew—glanced pleasantly at him as he stepped from the car into the soft gleam of a twilit evening on a quiet, curving, tree-lined avenue. With an effort he restrained himself from staring like a yokel at the green, leafy boughs through which lamps shone on a smooth lawn that edged the white pavement—at the shining pinnacle of the Blue Tower, looming five thousand sheer feet above the spotlessly clear dome. The wide purple sky was threaded with sunset gold.

"Pleasant evening, sir," one of the two watchdogs said. He appeared to be doing nothing but smiling respectfully but Bailey was aware that his fingers, diplomatically out of sight behind his

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back, were touching a key which would cause Bailey's counterfeit tag to be electronically scanned and its coded ident symbol transmitted to a local control station and checked for authenticity. He also knew that the false tag would easily pass this test but that on the ten-hourly recap—in six more hours—against the master-curve, the deception would be caught. A dummy tag, proof only against visual examination, would have cost no more than a hundred Q's as against the ten M price tag of the model he wore—but the investment had bought him three hundred and sixty minutes of freedom on Level Blue One. It was worth it.

With a casual nod Bailey brushed past the guards, lifted a finger to summon a heli whose operator had been dozing at the curb. Sinking back in the contoured seat, he directed the man to take him to the Apollo.

"Surface," he added. "Briskly, but not breakneck, you understand."

In spite of himself his heart was beginning to thump with a gathering sense of anticipation. It was not too late, still, to turn back. But once he set foot inside the Apollo Club the lightest penalty he could hope for if apprehended was a clean cortical wipe and retraining to gangman. The thought flickered and was forgotten. The business at hand outweighed all else. Bailey's mind had already leaped ahead to the next stage of the adventure. It was a long way from street-level to the penthouse of the Blue Tower—but when the moment came he would know what to do.

THE doorman at the Club Apollo stepped smoothly forward as Bailey came up the wide steps between the looming columns. With an easy gesture Bailey flipped up his swagger stick. The seemingly casual swing would have jabbed the attendant in the navel if he had continued his glide into Bailey's path. As the man checked, Bailey was past him.

"Send Wilf along, smartly now," Bailey ordered as the doorman, recovering his aplomb with an effort, fell in at his left and half a pace to the rear.

"Wilf? Why, I believe Wilf is off the premises at the moment, sir. Ah, sir, if I might inquire—"

"Then get him on the premises at once" Bailey said sharply. He cut abruptly to the right, causing the fellow to scramble again to

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overtake him. He gave the man a critical glance. "Have you been popping on duty, my man?"

"Wha—no, no indeed, sir, indeed not, M'lord."

"Good. Then be off with you." Bailey made shooing motions. The man gulped and hurried away. Bailey went down shallow steps into a long unoccupied room where soft lights sprang up at his entry.

At the autobar, he punched a Mist Devil, sipped the deceptively smooth, purple liquor, simultaneously wondering at its subtle flavor and savoring it with familiar delight.

There were pictures on the wall, gaudy patterned-space work for the most part, with here and there an acceptable early perforation-

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ist piece incongruous among the shallow daubs that flanked it. Bailey found himself clucking in disapproval. He turned as soft footfalls sounded behind him. A small dapper man was hurrying toward him across the wide rug, crooked smile on his narrow face. He bobbed his head.

"Wilf to serve you, sir," he piped in an elfin voice.

"I'm Jannock," Bailey said pleasantly. "I have some minutes to dispose of. I was told you'd show me about."

"A privilege, sir." Wilf glanced at the painting before which Bailey was standing. "I see you admire the work of Plinisse," he said. "The club has been fortunate enough to acquire a number."

"Frightful stuff," Bailey said flatly. "You've a few decent Zanskis, badly hung and lighted."

Wilf gave him an alert glance. "Candidly, I agree, sir—if you'll forgive the presumption."

"Suppose we take a look at your famous gaming rooms," Bailey said patronizingly.

"Of course." The little man led the way through a wide court with an illuminated fountain of dyed water, along a gallery with a vertiginous view of dark forestland far below—whether genuine or a projection, Bailey did not know.

"There are few members about so early, sir," Wilf said as they entered the garishly decorated hall for which the Apollo was famous. Chromatic light dazzled and glittered from scores of elaborate gambling machines, perched tall and intricate on deep rugs. A few men in modishly cut garb lounged at the bar. Couples were seated at a scattering of the tables on the raised dias at the far end of the room. Soft, plaintive music issued from an invisible source.

FASCINATED, Bailey circled the nearest apparatus, studying the polished convolutions of the spiral track along which a glass ball rolled at a speed determined by the player. The object, he knew, was to cause the missile to leap the groove at precisely the correct moment to place it in the payoff slot of the rotating disc below it. The disc was also controlled by the player. The knowledge flashed into Bailey's mind that hundreds of M's changed hands every minute the device was in play.

"Looks simple enough," he said.

"Do you think so?" The bland voice came from beside him. A man of middle age—perhaps over a hundred, being a Cruster—smiled gently at Bailey.

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"Sir Dovo," Wilf introduced the newcomer. "Sir Jannock, guest of Lord Ensino."

Bailey inclined his head to precisely the correct angle. "Enchanted, indeed, Sir Dovo. And indeed I do think so."

"You've played Flan before, Sir Jannock?"

Bailey/Jannock smiled indulgently. "Never. My taste has been for games of a more challenging character."

"So? Perhaps Flan would prove more diverting than you suspect."

"I could hardly refuse so intriguing an invitation," Bailey said with a show of casualness. He waited tensely for the response.

"Excellent," Dovo said with hardly perceptible hesitation. "May I explain the play?" He turned to the machine, quickly outlined the method of controlling the strength of the electrostatic field, the scoring of the hits on the coded areas of the slowly spinning disc. He called for a croupier, keyed the machine into action, made a few demonstration runs, then watched with a slight smile as Bailey took his practice shots with obvious lack of skill.

"Suppose we set the stakes at a token amount," Dovo suggested in a tone which might have been either patronizing or cynical. Bailey nodded.

"An M per point?" he suggested.

"Oh, let's say ten M, shall we?" Dovo smiled indulgently. Bailey, remembering his credit balance, managed to keep his expression bland.

"Under the circumstances, this being my first visit, I should prefer that the stakes be purely symbolic," he said. Dovo inclined his head in a way that almost—but not quite—suggested a touch of contempt.

"Perhaps your confidence has lost its initial fervor," he said with an apparently frank smile.

"As a stranger to you, Sir Dovo, I should dislike to take any considerable sum from you," Bailey replied tartly.

"As you wish. Shall we begin?"

Bailey played first, managed to lodge the ball in a chartreuse pocked marked *zan*. Dovo, with apparent ease, dislodged the marker, sending it to a white cup marked *nolo*, while his own came to rest in the gold-lined *rey*. Bailey missed the disc completely, occasioning some good-humored banter and necessitating the opening of the locked case by a steward and manual return of the ball to

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the play area. The double penalty thus incurred left him with four and a half M.

Playing first again, he managed to score a yellow *nex*, only to see Dovo casually drop his marker into the adjacent slot, thus scoring a triple bonus. Bailey made a disgusted sound.

"This is no exercise for a man of wit," he complained in a manner which fell just short of boorishness.

"I fail in my duty as host," Dovo said in a smooth tone. "Perhaps some other game to while away the time until the arrival of your, ah—" he smiled thinly—"of Lord Encino."

"No need to bother," Bailey said shortly.

"The Zoop tower? A set or two of Whirl? Or perhaps you'd find Slam more suited to your mood."

"Candidly, Sir Dovo, I find these toys tedious."

BAILEY dismissed the entire roomful of gambling machines with an airy wave of his hand, turning away as if to leave the room. At once, Dovo's voice reached after him.

"Surely, Sir Jannock, you'll allow me the opportunity to reinstate the club in your good graces by offering you play suitable to a gentleman of your undoubted talents?" There was an unmistakable trace of sarcasm in his tone.

Bailey turned. "My esteem for your delightful club remains as high as ever," he said acidly. "I'm grateful for your concern, but—"

"If it's intellectual exercise you crave, possibly a quarter or two of *shan-shan* with Sir Drace, our club master, might serve." Dovo's tone was plainly badgering now. There were knowing smiles on the smooth, handsomely chiseled faces around him. Wilf hovered at Bailey's elbow, making small, distressed sounds.

"I dislike *shan-shan* intensely," Bailey said disdainfully, starting on. "Superficial."

"A round of Tri-chess, then. Our membership includes a former grand champion who might offer some slight challenge. Or perhaps a set of Parallel. Or a flutter of Ten-deck."

Other voices chimed in with suggestions.

"What about a heptet of Reprise?" someone called.

Bailey halted, turned slowly, as if brought to bay. Maliciously smiling faces gazed at him, enjoying the moment's diversion, waiting to savor whatever parting shot he might muster.

"Reprise?" he said.

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"Why, yes." Dovo bobbed his head. "Have I succeeded in intriguing you? Or is it, too, numbered among these disciplines not favored with your approval?"

Bailey let the silence lengthen. Reprise, the knowledge came into his mind, was a game for the select few who had devoted a lifetime to its mastery. Even to learn the basic moves of the seventy-seven pieces required a year of intensive study. The recording and encephalotape transmission of such a skill was a serious crime. But he, thanks to the deft fingers of a tapelegger, had it all.

"I find Reprise a most delightful pastime," he said loftily. "I should very much enjoy a set."

Dovo looked blank. With an effort he hitched a smile of sorts back in place.

"Excellent," he said in a strained voice, turning to the man beside him. "Barlin, perhaps you'd be so good as to oblige Sir Jannock—"

"I had assumed, Sir Dovo, that you yourself would honor me," Bailey said. "Or perhaps you have a previous engagement at the Zoop tower." It was his turn to smile knowingly.

"Very well," Dovo said shortly. "I'll oblige you."

V

A SURF-MURMUR of chatter rose as Bailey took the seat offered him before a yard-cube wire construction scattered through with colored glass beads which glowed to sudden brilliance as Dovo activated the board. Each of the nexi, as the beads were called, could be moved according to a complex code of interrelating rules. The object of the game was to achieve a configuration which outranked the opposing one, again in consonance with an elaborate structure of interlocking taboos, prohibitions and compulsions. With a part of his mind, Bailey stared dazedly at the incomprehensible flash and glitter as Dovo took up his initial grouping; but another part of his brain observed with mild amusement the naivete of the other's elementary classroom opening.

"For an M per point, as before?" he inquired innocently.

"Come now, Sir Jannock," Dovo snapped. "For an afficionado of your attainments, one hundred M should not be excessive."

"Very well," Bailey said casually. "Will you open?" He smiled, conceding the prized advantage to his opponent. Dovo nodded

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shortly and after a moment's hesitation, made a clumsy *approche a droit*, technically legal enough, in that each of the forty-one nexi in play moved within their statutory limits; but pathetically inept in the aimlessness of the positioning. Bailey felt his hands move almost without volition, moving over the charged plate, shifting the beads *en gestalt* into a graceful spiral which twined among and around Dovo's hapless lineup. The latter stared for a long moment at the cage; his hands twitched toward the plate, twitched back. He looked up to meet Bailey's eyes.

"Why, I—I'm englobed." He choked out the words. "In one."

A surprised murmur rose, became a patter of applause. Cries of congratulation rang. Dovo smiled ruefully across the plate at Bailey.

"Neatly done," he said. "Masterfully played." He smiled now with genuine warmth. He referred, Bailey/Jannock knew, not only to the smashing victory at the cage but to the entire finesse, from the moment of Bailey's entry into the room. Boredom had, for the moment, been dispelled—the greatest service one could perform for the members of the Club Apollo.

Bailey relaxed, grinning in a way appropriate to a successful practical joker. "No more masterfully than you abolished me at Flan, Sir Dovo."

The latter handed over a gold-edged cred-card, glowing with the full charge of one hundred thousand Q's. Bailey waved it away. "Add it to the sweepfund," he said carelessly, a gesture calculated to lay at rest any lingering suspicion of shady motivations on his part.

Smiling in a relaxed way, he listened to the chatter around him, gauging the correct moment for the proposal to which the elaborate farce had been the preliminary.

There was a stir at the outer fringe of the crowd. A square-chinned, clean-cut man appeared, followed by a sleek, round-faced member in baroque robes, his figure as near to corpulent as Crust social pressure would allow.

"Sir Dovo, Sir Jannock—a bit of luck! I found Sir Swithin just passing through the atrium; I mentioned our guest's clever ploy—"

"Swithin?" Dovo ducked his head. "A stroke of fortune indeed. Perhaps you're acquainted with our young friend, Sir Jannock?"

The new arrival looked Bailey over coolly. Bailey wondered what version of the incident he had heard. "No, I've not met this young man. Which surprises me." Swithin had a buttery, self-

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indulgent voice. He glanced at the cage where the nexi still glowed in the end-game positions. "I was under the impression I knew the entire cadre of the gaming fraternity," he said somewhat doubtfully.

"I'm not a ranked Reprisist," Bailey said. "I play only for my own amusement."

Swithin nodded, giving the cage a final glance. "Interesting," he said. "Perhaps you'll honor me." Without waiting for assent, he plopped himself into the chair Dovo had vacated. With a flick of his hand he returned the nexi to starting lineup and looked at Bailey expectantly.

Bailey hesitated, then sat down. "The honor is mine," he said. "But one condition—token stakes only."

Swithin shot him a startled look, his lower lip thrust out. "What's that? Token stakes? Am I to understand—"

Dovo spoke up quickly.

"Having just taken a hundred M from me at one move, Sir Jannock is naturally desirous of not appearing greedy."

SWITHIN grunted, brushed the plate with his plump, jeweled fingers, sending the glowing beads darting to positions scattered apparently at random throughout the playing frame. But only to the uninitiate, Bailey/Jannock saw at a glance, would the move have seemed capricious. Swithin had taken up a well-nigh impregnable stance, each one of the seventy-seven nexi perfectly placed in an optimum relationship to all the others.

A complex move of which only a master player would be capable—but a move which carried within a concomitant weakness. Once broached in the smallest particular, Swithin's complex structure would collapse into meaningless sub-groupings. It was a win-or-lose gambit, an attempt to smash an opponent at one blow, as Bailey/Jannock had smashed Dovo's pathetic opening.

Bailey pretended to study the layout gravely, while a murmur passed through the spectators. Swithin sat back, his features as expressionless as a paw-licking cat's. Hesitantly, Bailey/Jannock touched his plate. There was a seemingly trivial readjustment of nexi in east dexter chief. Swithin glanced up in surprise, as if about to question whether the minor shift were indeed Bailey's only reply. Then he checked, looked again at the cage. Slowly, the color drained from his face. He ducked his head stiffly.

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"Well played, sir," he said in a strained tone.

"What is it?"

"I don't understand—"

"What are they waiting for?"

The remarks died away as Swithin cleared the cage.

Only then did noise burst out as the watchers realized what they had seen. Dovo beamed proudly on his new discovery as Swithin glowered. Reports that the club champion has been beaten in one lightning move were being relayed quite audibly across the room.

"Once again, sir?" the plump man said harshly. "For an adequate stake this time."

"If you will," Bailey/Jannock said pleasantly. It was his opening now, a distinct advantage. Swithin drew a sharp breath as it dawned on him how neatly he had been ployed into throwing away his own opening on a flashy but unsound attack.

"Would one thousand M seem about right?" Bailey inquired in the same easy tone.

The talk died as if guillotined. A thousand M was high stakes even here.

"Sir—" Swithin began.

Bailey cut in smoothly, "Actually, I'd prefer to keep our play on a purely friendly basis. After all, as unranked dabbler, I'm presumptuous even in taking a seat against you."

The challenge was unmistakable—and unrefusable. Swithin, still pale but calm, nodded jerkily.

"Done. Proceed, sir."

Bailey stroked the plate. The glowing beads leaped through half a dozen graceful configurations to end in starting position. Another apparently careless brush of his fingers and they snapped into a branched formation of deceptive simplicity. Swithin frowned, drew out his nexi into a demi-rebut, a congruent array, paralleling Bailey's, a move of caution. Swithin would not be taken again on the same hook. Bailey extended pseudopodia in fess, dexter and sinister, with a balancing tendril curling away in south nombril, thus forcing his opponent to abandon his echoic stance. Swithin, obliged to make his move in the same time required by the opener, fell back on an awkward deployment, totally defensive in nature. Bailey made a neutral rearrangement, a feint taking only a fraction of a second, forcing the pace. Swithin returned with a convulsive expansion, recoiling from the center of play. Swift as flickering light-

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ning. Bailey cycled his array through a set of inversions, forcing his opponent to retire into a self-paralyzing fortress stance—

And barely in time, saw the trap the plump champion had set for him. In mid-play, he caught himself, diverted the abortive encirclement he had begun into a flanking pincers. Caught in his own trap, unable to change directions as swiftly as had Bailey, Swithin bluffed with a piercing stab flawed by an almost unnoticeable discontinuity. The watchers sighed as the lightning interchange ceased abruptly.

Taking his time now, Bailey shifted a rank of nexi to complete a perfect check position. On the next move, regardless of Swithin's return, the game was his. The plump man's face was the color of pipe clay. He prodded the plate with stiff hands, shifting his stance in a meaningless shuffle. He looked up, his expression sick. For a long moment Bailey held the other's gaze. Then, with a touch of his fingers, he made a subtle rearrangement which converted his checkmate into a neutral deadlock. For a moment Swithin sagged; then his quick eye grasped what Bailey had done. Color flooded back into his face.

"A draw," someone blurted. "By gad, Swithin's drawn him." The watchers crowded around, laughing and bantering. As Bailey rose, Swithin came around the table to him.

"Why did you do it?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I need a favor," Bailey murmured.

SWITHIN studied him sharply, assessing him. "You're an adventurer," he accused.

Bailey smiled crookedly. "I want a crack at the Fornax," he said softly.

Swithin narrowed his eyes. "You aim high. I have no way of getting you into the Blue Tower."

"Think of a way."

Swithin clamped his jaw. "You ask too much."

"What about another game—to break the tie?" Bailey suggested gently. "For the same stakes, of course."

Swithin's head jerked. His peril had not yet ended.

At that moment Dovo said, "Well, sirs, we can't leave it at that." He shot a look of idle malice at Swithin. "Another set—unofficial, of course—will show us where the power lies, eh?"

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Swithin looked at Bailey, naked appeal in his face. Bailey smiled genially.

"I'd prefer to rest on my laurels," he said easily. "I fear Sir Swithin will not be so gentle with me another time."

"Sir Jannock is too modest," Swithin said. "He is a player of rare virtuosity. It was all I could do to hold him." He held up his hands as a chorus of protest started. "But," he went on, "I have another proposal—one calculated to afford us better sport than the mere humbling of an old comrade." He shot a venomous look at Dovo. "I am thinking, gentlemen, of a certain gamester of swollen reputation and not inconsiderable arrogance, to wit, his Excellency, Lord Tace, champion of Club Fornax."

A yell went up. When it had faded sufficiently for a single voice to be heard, Dovo called, "Are you sure, Swithin? Tace? Can he do it?"

All eyes were on Bailey/Jannock. His purchased memories told him that Tace was a formidable opponent. Precisely how formidable he did not know.

"Tace, eh?" he said musingly. "Out of the question, of course. I fear I have no entrée into that exalted circle."

"Plandot," someone said. "He's a member at Fornax."

"Get Plandot," the shout went up.

The crowd surged away, babbling like excited schoolboys.

"Well done, sir." Bailey bowed to the older man.

"Just what are you after?" Swithin demanded.

"Oh, say ten thousand M?" Bailey's tone belied the seriousness of his meaning. "You'll honor me by accepting ten per cent," he added.

"Tace is no amateur," Swithin snapped.

"Neither am I," Bailey said. The two eyed each other. Swithin with a trapped look, Bailey/Jannock relaxed and at ease.

A shout went up from across the room.

"Plandot will meet us at the Blue Tower in half an hour. Tace is there—and in a nasty mood."

"What if you lose?" Swithin persisted. "Can you cover?"

For an instant Bailey hesitated. Once again, the dream-image flashed on his mind—the half-seen face, the silent voice.

You can do it, Douglas. Together, we can do it . . .

"Don't concern yourself," Bailey said flatly. "That's my part of the game."

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VI

FROM the distance of a half-mile the Blue Tower reared up almost to zenith, its slim length aglow with the soft azure radiance that served as a beacon across five hundred miles of empty air. At a hundred yards it had become a shining wall, intricately fluted, a radiant backdrop spreading like a stage curtain across the avenue. Stepping from the car onto the broad parking apron, Bailey felt the building's incredible mass hanging above him like a second moon. Even his jolly companions had lost some of their airy self-assurance. In near silence the party mounted the polished chrome-slab steps, passed through the impalpable resistance of the ion-screen into the vaulted entry foyer. The talk, as they rode the spiral escalator up past tiers of jewel-like murals, railed galleries, glassed-in terraces, was overly loud, forced, only gradually regaining its accustomed boisterousness as they stepped off in the pink and silver-frosted lounge to be met by a lean, sharp-featured man whom they greeted as Lord Plandot. The latter looked Bailey over as the introductions were made, his face twitching into a foxy smile.

"So you think you can spring a little surprise on Tace, eh? Be careful he doesn't surprise you instead, sir. I fancied myself as a gamesman until he took my measure."

While Bailey's escort went into a huddle over strategy and tactics, he scanned the room, noting a number of featureless doors opening from a wide alcove, mirror-bright panels of polished metal.

"Where do those lead?" he asked Swithin.

"Why, to the upper levels. The Club Fornax occupies only this floor—"

"What's up there?" Bailey cut in.

"Various offices, living quarters; certain governmental functions are housed on the highest levels. The Lord Magistrate occupies the penthouse."

"How do you know which door leads where?"

"If you had business there, I assume you'd know. Otherwise, it hardly matters."

The sound of restless music issued from a red-lit archway. The group, including Swithin, moved toward the sound.

Dovo caught Bailey's eye, joined him. Plandot led the two along a carpeted passage into a somber room lit only by luminous-pat-

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terned walls. The ugly but costly pseudo-Aztec furnishings cast angular shadows across the dark-waxed parquet floor. As Plandot went ahead, Plandot nudged Bailey, pointed out an imposing white-maned figure seated alone before a shielded arc-fire.

"We'll rely on Plandot to draw him out. Tace is an irascible old devil, but not one to let pass an opportunity to put an upstart in his place." He gave Bailey a sly glance.

Bailey passed five minutes in admiring the inlay-work of the tabletops, the mosaic wall decorations and the silky tapestries, before Plandot beckoned. He and Dovo crossed the room.

Eagle-sharp eyes surveyed him. The shaggy brows were like tufts of winter grass on a rocky cliff of forehead.

"Plandot tells me you fancy yourself as a Reprisist," Lord Tace growled.

"In a small way," Bailey said in confident tones. He smiled an irritating smile.

Tace rose to the bait. "Small way," he rumbled. "As well speak of dying in a small way. Reprise is a lifetime undertaking, young man."

"Oh, I don't know that I've found it so very difficult, sir." Deliberately, Bailey smirked.

Tace snorted. "Plandot, are you people making sport of me?" He glared at the tall man.

"By no means, m'lord," Plandot said imperturbably. "My friends at the Apollo appear to have great faith in their protege. Of course, I accepted the wager on your behalf. If you wish to decline, no matter, I shall settle the account—and quite rightly, in view of my presumption—"

"Apollo Club? What's all this?" Tace heaved himself around in his chair to survey Dovo. "Oh, you're in this too, are you, Dovo? Then I assume it's not merely Plandot's idea of baiting an old man."

Dovo executed a graceful half-bow. "I see now that we were overenthusiastic, m'lord," he said smoothly. "My apologies. Of course you're much too fully engaged to indulge our fancy—"

"Just how enthusiastically did you intend to back your man?" Tace cut in sharply.

"I believe the sum mentioned was five hundred M's," Dovo murmured.

"Fifteen hundred," Bailey corrected. "Sir Swithin seems to

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have some confidence in my small abilities," he explained at Dovo's startled look.

"That's a considerable degree of enthusiasm," Tace said. He studied Bailey's face, looked at his clothes. "Just who are you?" he demanded abruptly.

"Jannock," Bailey said. The name was an appropriate one, common enough to arouse no particular attention among a worldwide Cruster population of two hundred million, while suggesting adequate connections. Still Tace eyed him intently.

"I say, m'lord," Dovo murmured. "Sir Jannock is here by my request, under the aegis of Club Apollo—"

"How long have you known him?" Tace demanded.

"Only briefly—but he enjoys the sponsorship of Lord Encino—"

"Is Encino here?"

"No, but—"

"Did Encino introduce him to you personally?"

Dovo looked startled. "No," he said. "His man, Wilf—"

Tace barked what might have been a laugh. "Sponsored by a bodyservant, eh?"

"Sirs," Bailey said firmly as all eyes swung to him. "I see I have occasioned embarrassment. My apologies." He hesitated, gauging the temper of his listeners. Their looks were stony. It was time to take a risk. "Perhaps I should have mentioned the name of my Caste Advisor, Lord Monboddo. I'm sure that he can satisfy any curiosity you may have as to my *bona fides*."

The silence told him that he had blundered.

"Lord Monboddo," Sir Dovo said in a brittle tone, "died seven months ago."

NOT a flicker of expression reflected Bailey's racing thoughts. Instead he smiled ruefully, turned and inclined his head to Dovo. "Of course," he said smoothly. "How hard the habits of thought die. I meant, naturally, m'lord's successor as Lord Chancellor of the Heraldic Institute."

"And what might—" Dovo started. At that moment there was a stir across the room. The voice of a steward became audible, a strained stage whisper: "My lord, a moment, by your leave—"

"There he is. Stand aside, you fool!" A ragged, high-pitched voice snarled the words. Another steward hurried past, headed for the entry. A tall, gray-haired man stood there, his path blocked

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by a pair of husky servitors. His eyes were fixed on Bailey—feverish, wild eyes.

"They've done it for pure spite," he choked. "He was my guest, mine! They had no right—" He switched his look to Dovo. "You, Dovo, it's your doing," he called. "Give him back at once. He came for me, not—" The rest of the intruder's cry was muffled by a cloud of pink gas which puffed suddenly in his face. As the agitated nobleman tottered, the stewards closed about him, helped him away.

"Your friend Lord Encino seems somewhat agitated, Sir Jannock," Tace broke the silence. "His jealousy of your company suggests we are doubly fortunate to have you with us."

Bailey smiled coolly as Dovo and Plandot began babbling at once, the tension relieved. Lord Tace rose stiffly, using a cane. "So you're curious as to whether the old man is as thorny an antogonist as reputed, eh?" He showed a stiff smile, "Very well, sirs—I accept your wager. But traditionally the challenged party has the choice of weapons, eh?"

Dovo's face fell. "Why, as to that—"

"To perdition with your childish game of Reprise," the old man snapped. Through the mask of cosmeticized age, Bailey caught a glimpse of a savage competetiveness. "Instead we'll try our wits at a sport that's a favorite among the rats that swarm our cellars, eh? A true gamble, on life and death and the rise and fall of fortunes."

"Just what are you proposing, m'lord?" Dovo blurted.

"Have you ever heard of an illegal lottery called Booking the Vistat Run?" Lord Tace stared from one of his listeners to the other, ended fixing his eyes challengingly on Bailey.

"I've heard of it," Bailey said neutrally.

"Ha! Then you're sharper than these noddies." Tace jerked his leonine head at Dovo and Plandot. "Doubtless they scorn to interest themselves in such low matters. But at my age I seek sensation wherever it's to be found—and I've found it in the pulse of the census." He stared at Dovo. "Well, how say you? Will you back your man in a gutter game of raw nerve and naked chance?"

"Now, really, m'lord—" Dovo began his protest.

"We'll be happy to try our hand," Bailey said carelessly. He glanced at the ornate clock occupying the center of a complex relief filling the end wall of the gloomy chamber. "We'd best

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declare our lines at once if we're to book the twenty-hour stat run."

THE private game room to which Lord Tace conducted Bailey and the Apollo members contrasted sharply with the blighted cold-water flat from which Gus Aroon had rolled his book three months before—but the mathematics of the game was unchanged. Bailey glanced over the record charts, began setting up his lines. After the dazzling action of the Reprise cage, the programing seemed a dry and academic affair but the expressions of the aristocrats clustered about the stat screen showed that their view of the matter was far different.

"Well, sirs," Tace rumbled, watching them as the first figures began to flicker across the readout panels. "The gamble stirs your blood, eh? Do the statistical fluctuations of the society that seethes like poisoned yeast below us provide a hardier sport than glowing baubles?"

"Those numbers," Dovo said. "Difficult to realize that each one represents the birth and death of a man—"

"Or of his fortunes," Tace barked. "Production and consumption, taxes and theft, executions, suicides, the rise and fall of human destinies. One thousand billion people, each the center of his Universe. And we sit here like gods squatting on Olympus and tally the score."

A half-hour later, Tace's exuberance declined as he assessed the initial hour's results. After the twenty-two run he lapsed into a rumbling silence. An hour later he cursed openly as another five hundred M changed hands, to the profit of the Apollo book. Bailey played steadily, silently, taking no unnecessary risks, outpointing the old man on run after run. At oh two hundred, with Tace's original capitalization reduced to a few score M, Bailey suggested closing the book. Tace raged. An hour later he had lost another hundred and fifty M.

"I really cannot continue," Bailey said, leaning back in his chair before the programer console. "I'm quite exhausted."

"But such a sportsman as Lord Tace would hardly agree to stop now," Dovo said eagerly, naked greed shining on his normally bland face. He looked with sly insolence at the embattled oldster. "M'lord deserves his chance to recoup—"

"I am not as young as I once was," Tace began in a voice which

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had acquired a distinct whining note. He broke off at a sharp buzz from the communicator plate, slapped a hand over the sensitive grid.

"I said no interruptions," he grated, then paused to listen. His expression changed, became one of thoughtful concern. With a show of reluctance he blanked the grid.

"It seems we must continue another time, sirs," he said in a tone unctious with regret. "The Sub-Commandant of Peace is waiting in the foyer. It appears that a criminal enemy of the Order is suspected of having somehow penetrated the Fornax."

"So? How does that affect us?" Dovo demanded.

"The Commandant wishes to make a physical inspection of all portions of the premises," Tace went on. "Including the private gaming areas."

"Unreasonable," Dovo snapped.

"Still, one must cooperate," Tace said, throwing the switch which unlocked the doors. "Shall we go along and observe the Bugs at work?" He smiled at his use of the vernacular.

"Best we close the bank first," Dovo murmured.

"Of course." Tace poked at the keys on the gaming board. A cascade of platinum-edged ten-M credcards showered from the dispenser. Plandot counted them out, handed fifty to Dovo, the rest of the stack to Bailey/Jannock, who accepted them absently, turned to Sir Swithin. "Would you oblige me, sir?" I feel the need of a moment to refresh myself." He dumped the double handful of cash—a fortune even here—into the startled man's hands and turned toward the discreetly marked door. A burst of chatter rose behind him but with such a pledge in hand no one raised objection.

INSIDE the chrome and black toilet Bailey walked quickly past the attendant to the rear of the room, tried the narrow service door in the corner. Locked. He whirled on the soft-footed attendant who had followed him.

"Get this open," he snapped.

"Sir?" The man prepared to lapse into dumb insolence. Bailey caught him by the tunic front, shook him once, threw him against the wall.

"Do as you're told," he stated. "Haven't you heard there's an enemy of the Order at large in the club?"

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"S-s-sir," the man mumbled, pressing an electrokey against the slot. The door slid back. Bailey stepped through and was in a dark passage. Dim lights went up at his first step. He tried doors—the third opened on a white-walled room where several stewards lounged around a long table.

"As you were," Bailey barked as the startled servants scrambled to their feet. "Remain in this room until told to leave. You—" He stabbed his finger at a thick-shouldered, frowning fellow with red pips on his collar who appeared about to speak. "Lead the way to the prefect's office."

"Me?" The man gaped, taken aback.

"You." Bailey repeated. He strode to the door, flicked it open. The big man lumbered past him. Bailey stepped out, looked both ways. The corridor was empty. He struck once with the edge of his hand, caught the man as he collapsed. Swiftly he checked the man's pockets, turned up a flat card to which keys were attached. He covered the distance to the next intersection at a run, slowed to a walk rounding the corner. Two men came toward him, one an indignant chap with the waxed-and-polished look Bailey had come to expect of Crusters past their first youth. The other was a small, quick-eyed man in plain dark clothes, as out of place here in Blue Level territory as a cockroach on a silver tray.

As Bailey started to pass them, the dark little man turned, put out a restraining hand.

Bailey spoke first.

"What the hell are you doing, standing here gossiping?" he snapped. "We're here on business, remember? What are you doing about the dead man in the cross-corridor?" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction from which he had come, turned his attention to the polished Cruster.

"Sir, I'll have to insist that you go along to the lift foyer," Bailey said briskly. "If you please, sir." He made an impatient motion. The man made a gobbling noise and set off at a rapid walk. Bailey followed without looking back.

They passed a group of grim-faced plainclothes Peacemen. None gave them more than a glance. As they came into the circular silver-and-rose chamber where Bailey had first arrived, he halted his companion with a word. Clusters of uniformed Peacemen were grouped here and there throughout the room. Bailey pointed to a shoulder-tabbed officer.

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"Tell the adjutant the snarfitar is bonfrect," he ordered. As the Cruster stiffened and opened his mouth to protest, Bailey forstalled him. "We're couting on you, sir. You and I between us will make this pinch. And whatever you do, don't look at me."

"The—snarfitar is bonfrect?" The man queried.

"Exactly. And the doolfroon have taken over the ignort."

"Doolfroon's taken over the ignort." The man hurried away, rehearsing the words in a mumble. Bailey watched the officer turn as the messenger approached. He waited until the sound of raised voices told him the message had been delivered. He strolled behind a group of Peacemen who stared toward the disturbance. Bailey tried keys until one opened the lift door. He stepped into a silver-filigree-decorated, white-leather-upholstered car and punched the top key.

TRAVELING upward, Bailey changed cars three times at intermediate levels, each time under the eyes of guards alert for a man descending, before he reached the tower suite. He stepped out, found himself in a mirror-walled anteroom that was carpeted in soft gray.

A wide white-and-silver door stood at one side. It opened at his touch.

Across the room a square-faced man, black hair carelessly combed, looked up with a faintly puzzled expression.

"Are you Micael Drans?" Bailey heard himself ask.

"Yes."

Bailey moved and the gun he had bought in another lifetime, six hours earlier, was in his hand. He raised it to point squarely at the forehead of the man behind the desk. His finger moved to the firing stud.

A side door burst open. A girl stood there, wide-eyed, white-gowned, elegant. In a single step she was between them, shielding the victim with her slim body. A gun in her jeweled hand was aimed at Bailey's chest.

"No, Douglas Bailey," she cried. "Drans mustn't die."

Images flooded in on Bailey, superimposed, running together: a bodiless face, a soundless voice; a sense of unspeakable longing, of irretrievable loss. And of paradise, impossibly regained, standing before him.

"I remember you," Bailey said. His voice sounded blurred to

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his ears; the room, the girl, the man sitting rigid behind the desk had taken on a dream-like quality. "You're the girl who helped me. And the face in my dreams. And . . . something more".

"Throw the gun away, Douglas," she insisted.

Bailey trembled, sick with the hunger of his need to love, his need to kill. "I can't," he groaned. "Drans has to die."

"Why?" the girl demanded.

Bailey's body shook with the agony of his frustration. He moved sideways to sidestep the girl. She faced him, moving as he did.

"The voice," he said, remembering. "In the Euthansia Center; it told me how to control my circulation to keep the drug from paralyzing my heart, how to make my legs work enough to carry me out through the service door. It told me to come here, shoot Micael Drans. I have to kill him. Stand aside. I'll kill you if I have to."

"Douglas," the girl's voice was low, urgent. "Micael Drans is more important than you can dream—than even *he* dreams." She spoke over her shoulder to the watchful man at the desk. "Micael —something very important has happened within the last few hours." It was a statement, not a question.

Drans nodded slowly. "Yes." He seemed calm, though puzzled.

"A message," the girl said. "A message from very far away."

A look of incredulity came over Drans' face. "How could you know of that, Aliea?"

"The message is genuine," the girl said in an intense voice. "Believe it, Micael." Bailey listened, feeling the sweat trickling down the side of his face. His heart thudded dully.

"I think I understand part of it, Douglas," the girl went on, "You received a part—but I received the rest. You knew *what*—and I knew *why*. I made my way here—just as you did. I didn't understand, then—but now I do. And you must, too."

"I have to kill him—"

"I can shoot first, Douglas," she said steadily. "You're confused, under terrible stress. I'm not. You must try to understand. Perhaps—" she broke off. "Douglas, close your eyes. Concentrate. Let me try to reach you—"

Like an automaton, he followed instructions.

Blackness. Swirling light. Out of the darkness, a shape that hovered, a complex structure of light that was not light, a structure incomplete, needing him to complete it. He moved toward it,

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sensing how the ragged surfaces of his own being reached out to meet and merge with its opposite—

Light blossomed like a sudden dawn. All barriers fell. Her mind lay open to him.

Now come, Douglas, her voice spoke in his brain. *I'll lead you . . .*

He followed along a dark path that plunged down, down, through terrible emptiness.

And emerged into—somewhere. He was aware of the compound ego-matrix that was himself, Bailey/Aliea; saw all the foreshortened perspective of his narrow life, her pinched, love-starved existence. And saw the presence that had reached out, touched him/her—and abruptly, he/she *was* that other presence.

He lay in darkness, suffering. Not the mere physical pain of the wasted, ancient body—that was nothing. But the ceaseless, relentless pain of the knowledge of failure, the bitterness of vain regret for the irretrievable blunder of long ago.

Then, out of despair, a concept born of anguish; the long struggle, probing back down along the closed corridor along which he had come, searching, searching; and at last the first hint of success, the renewed striving, the moment of contact with the feeble, flickering life-mote that glowed so faint and far away:

DOUGLAS BAILEY. LISTEN TO ME. YOU MUST NOT DIE. THERE IS THAT WHICH MUST BE DONE AND ONLY YOU CAN DO IT. LISTEN: THIS IS WHAT YOU MUST DO . . .

THE girl still stood, aiming the weapon at his heart. Tears ran down her face but the gun did not waver.

"It was the voice," Bailey said. "You and I were—linked. We—touched him, were him. He's the one who made me live, sent me here. Who was he? What was he?"

"He's a man, Douglas. A dying man, a hundred years in the future. In some way that perhaps not even he understands, he projected his mind back along his own lifeline—to us."

"How?" Bailey asked. "Why?" Bailey asked.

"I think he meant only to reach one man, to explain the terrible thing that had happened, to enlist your help to do what he believed had to be done to right the wrong. But his brain was too powerful, too complex. An ordinary mind couldn't encompass it. I was near—on the Intermix, ready to jump. A part of his message

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spilled over—into my mind. I saw what had happened, what *would* happen—saw who and where you were, knew that I had to help you—but I didn't know—didn't understand what it was you were to do."

"A message," Bailey said, remembering the flood of impressions. "A transmission from a point in space beyond Pluto. A ship—heading for Earth. Aliens—from a distant star. They asked for peace and friendship. And we gave them—death."

Drans spoke up. His voice strained. "When did we attack?"

"Sarday, Sember twenty," Bailey said. "Black Sarday."

"Tomorrow's date," Drans said in a voice like cracked metal.

"And Micael Drans was the man who gave the order," Bailey blurted. "Don't you see, Aliea? That's why *he* sent me here, why Drans has to die."

"For three days and three nights I've wrestled with it," Drans said dully. "Pro and con, trust or mistrust, kill—or welcome. There are so many factors to consider, so terrible a risk—"

"An you decided it had to be death—because how could man, who had betrayed his own species, trust another race?"

"Is it possible?" Drans stared from Aliea to Bailey. "Can you know the future? In some miraculous way, were you sent here to save me from this terrible decision? Can we trust them? Are they what they say?"

"They come as friends," Aliea said softly.

Drans stood. "I believe you," he said. "Because the alternative is too bitter to contemplate." He stepped forward, gently thrust the girl aside. "Do your duty," he said flatly to Bailey.

"Douglas—no," Aliea said swiftly. "You know now, don't you?"

Bailey looked at the defenseless man before him. He lowered the gun, nodded.

"The voice—the dying man, a hundred years from now. It was—is—will be you: Micael Drans. You sent me back to kill yourself before you gave the death order."

"Only a very good man would have done that, Douglas," Aliea said. "Micael Drans is one of the few good men alive in these vicious times. He has to live—to meet the ship, welcome the aliens to our world."

"Will you do it?" Bailey asked.

"Why—yes. Yes, of course." Life came back into Drans' face. He turned to his desk, spoke rapidly into an intercom.

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Bailey opened his fingers, let the gun fall to the floor. He felt suddenly empty, exhausted. It was all meaningless now, a vista of blown dust, crumbling ashes.

"Douglas—what is it?" Aliea's face wavered before him. "It's all right now. It's over. You did it. *We* did it."

"A puppet," Bailey said. "That's all I was. I served my purpose. There's nothing left. I'm back where I was."

"Oh, no," Aliea cried. "Douglas, you're wrong, so wrong."

"For the first time in my life, I had pride, self-respect. I thought it was I who invaded Preke territory and stayed alive, absorbed an education, sweated out the Maxpo treatment. I believed it was I, Douglas Bailey, who faced down the Crusters on their own turf, bluffed them all, took what I wanted, made my way here. But it wasn't. He was guiding me every step of the way. And now it's over and there's nothing left."

Aliea smiled, shaking her head. "No, Douglas. Think, remember. He gave you a mission, true. And one other thing he did: he took away fear. The rest you did yourself."

Bailey frowned at her. "I was like a man in a dream all those weeks. That complex plan, the twisting and turning, the bluffs and the chances I took—"

"Don't you see? He couldn't have planned it all. He had no way of knowing what would happen, how you should meet what came. It was you, Douglas. Once fear is gone, all things are possible."

"Aliea's right," Micael Drans said. He came around the desk to stand beside them. "There's no way for me to thank you. But in eighteen hours, the Evala ship will take up its orbit beyond Luna—peacefully. Much will have to be done. I'll need help. Will you stay, accept positions on my personal staff?"

"Of course," Aliea said.

"If you really think—if I can be of any use . . ." Bailey said. He felt Aliea's hand touch his—felt the touch of her mind, delicate as a blown feather.

Together, we'll do it, Douglas.

"Yes," he said. "I'll stay."

We must tell him, Aliea's thought spoke in his mind. Bailey closed his eyes; together they reached out across the void, found him, waiting there in darkness.

Together, they waited for the sound of a new thunder in the skies of Earth. ∞

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1. Petite Dream-Girl

"Please." The voice was small but distinctly feminine and seemed to emanate inches from his ear. "Please, Mr. Fowler, please wake up."

"Burg to my friends," he muttered sleepily. He was one of those bachelors the men's magazines declined to acknowledge—the kind that works for a living and sleeps alone. On weekends such as this he liked to sleep late in spite of an early bedtime. This was partly to get back at the alarm clock and partly because it made the day shorter. At the moment he was in that transitional state he sometimes achieved upon such lazy awakening—in it he could hear and to a certain extent control intriguing dream dialogue.

"Please, Mr. Fowler. We only have an hour. Please look at me."

"Sure, honey," he murmured, eyes closed. The voice was absolutely lovely and remarkably convincing, as though a beautiful woman lay beside him. He had never before indulged in such a pleasant trance. But he knew that it would dissipate the moment he opened his eyes. All that shared his bedroom by daylight were dirty socks, clean shirts, a portable radio afflicted with intermittent static and last night's cold-slopped coffee. And, of course, the book he had read himself to sleep on. What was it? He couldn't remember.

Something soft touched his right ear.

He twitched his head aside, instantly alert. Light blinded him, forcing his eyes shut again. This had never been part of a dialogue! Had a moth gotten in?

He turned his head carefully and squinted.

Suddenly he remembered what he had been reading. It was a text from a night course in British poetry. He had signed up in the hope that he might meet his dream girl on the college campus, since he hadn't met her elsewhere. Unfortunately it developed that few women took night courses and those who did were mostly centenarian schoolteachers in for recency-of-credit. But he had discovered serendipitously that old-time verse was not entirely dull; indeed, it was as though the poets were men very like himself, bound by similar frustrations but with the wit to make them elegant. Andrew Marvell complained about his coy mistress (at least he *had* one); Lord Byron rhapsodized about a maid of Athens; Dante Gabriel Rossetti (always learn the full name, the professor

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admonished the class) commented on a goblet supposedly molded in the shape of the breast of Helen of Troy. That was the poem Burg had fallen asleep on: *Troy Town.*

Heavenborn Helen, Sparta's queen/(O Troy Town!)/Had two breasts of ivory sheen/ . . .

He couldn't remember the rest.

He had seen those two breasts, those images of man's desire. Supple yet voluptuous, firm yet perfect. Just now.

"That's not fair, Mr. Fowler. You didn't really look."

He opened his eyes fully. A doll stood on his pillow. A nine-inch high, gracefully woman-shaped figurine dressed in yellow. Its proportions were so accurately and lovingly rendered that the effect was rather like contemplating a real woman from a distance. This replica had everything. In fact, it was very like his fanciful ideal.

"I can explain," the doll said in that same delightful voice. "I thought you'd like to see me nude but since you shut your eyes again so quickly I decided—"

Burgess Fowler rolled off the bed and stumbled to the bathroom. He ran the sink full of cold water and dunked his face in it open-eyed. Then, absolutely awake, he performed certain other routine morning chores and returned in his pajamas to the bedroom.

"We have only fifty minutes left," she complained. "You're not being very cooperative, Mr. Fowler."

He sat down on the bed. "Troy Town!" He was not a swearing man ordinarily. "I don't touch drugs of any kind, so it isn't that. I drink only in moderation and never alone. I am not overtired and when I am I'm not much given to hallucinations. I—"

The doll stamped her little foot on the top sheet. Her heel made a pinpoint dent.

"The committee went to a great deal of trouble to locate you and learn your tastes and—and get me here," she said. "You're wasting invaluable time, Mr. Fowler. Please listen to—"

Burg brought her to him with a sweep of his left hand. "Now, my little practical joke!" he said. "We'll see what makes you operate—"

She was not doll-like to the touch. His hand enclosed her torso and his thumb was aware of two singularly realistic breasts—the same he had seen in the first bright glimpse?—rising and falling under the dress while his palm felt the rondure of a sweet derriere.

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Her waist was lithe and narrow, her hips soft and broad. She was warm and she smelled of perfume—a brand he could not name, but liked.

He set her down, disgruntled.

"You can't be alive."

She rearranged her apparel and combed the tangles out of her hair. Her tresses were the precise shade of brown he liked, curled in just-so.

"If you will only pay attention, Mr. Fowler!"

"I'm trying to—but you're hard to believe at one sitting."

"I know I'm a little small for you but it was the best they could do. There is so little time. Please help me, Mr. Fowler."

Burg would still have dismissed her as some kind of a powered toy, except for the remembered feel of her body and her present too-human animation. A doll did not breathe, and certainly did not react as directly and specifically as she was doing. "All right, I'll help you, mini-girl whoever you are. Whatever you say your crew sent you for. What do you want?"

"I want," she said seriously, "to make love."

2. Animate Senescence

The Council of Oomus foregathered in tired splendor. All of the scions of the leading lines were present: the ranking scientists, philosophers and economists of the world. Here in the temple of the ancients, within a chamber overlooking the effete surging of the Sea of Life, they harkened to momentous developments.

The chairman withdrew his perception from the demesnes of that warning Source and broadcast for attention. Once such a signal might have bathed the planet—now it was barely sufficient to alert those nearest. The minds within the great old hall yielded courteously.

Please review the discussion of our last Assembly, the chairman thought.

The Recorder now projected his summary. *At our last Assembly, three years ago, we received the report of the Committee on the State and Sadness of our World. We reluctantly accepted the verdict of our brothers: that our present misfortune is due to a condition of animate senescence. Unless rejuvenation occurs within our*

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lifetime, the critical point will pass and our form of life, including the animation of all our world, will inexorably perish. Therefore we agreed to undertake radical measures and invest our remaining reserves in a project promising relief. This consists of negotiating and expediting an exchange with a world possessing a surplus of the animus we require.

An Economist interjected: *Omission! We cannot permit specific communication with another realm, though extinction be the forfeit. So has our inviolable custom been; so it must remain.*

Correction incorporated, the Recorder explained. *The exchange was to be instituted in such a way that our identity is never betrayed, yet complete satisfaction rendered to the other party. Above all, it is our custom to be ethical. Yet satisfaction may be achieved in divers ways. Such a program was instituted by an ad hoc Committee and the Assembly adjourned.*

The Chairman thanked the Recorder. Then: *What is the report of that duly constituted Expeditionary Committee?*

3. Courtship

"Mini-girl—mind if I call you Minnie? There are things that I might do for you, and gladly," Burg said. "But making love is not among them. For that you need a man. A man your size, I mean."

"Oh, no, Mr. Fowler," she protested, laying a tiny hand on his little finger. "It must be you. They were very clear about that. You have just the right—I mean, I exist only for you. I love you."

There was, then, an ulterior motive of some sort. The crew that had sent her to him had a price for its service. He was not, however, obliged to accept it, since this was unsolicited merchandise. She could charm him as she wished, but that would be all. He was not going to pay any exorbitant fee for this doll, or sign any dubious documents.

The strange thing was that, whatever her secret, she did conform to his ideals of femininity. Had she been full-size, her measurements would have been about 36-24-36, or perhaps a trifle more generous, with all the other physical attributes congenial. More than that, there was an intangible charm about her, a symmetry of manner and proportion that evoked pleasure in the contemplation. Her attire complemented her features perfectly, and

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her face had just that quality of imperfect maturity he preferred. Even her little mannerisms, such as the conservative—yet exciting—way she put her slender fingers on him and the lift of her fine chin when she spoke—all of it was the kind of thing he had been searching for and had, in his not-so-secret heart, never expected to attain. For if such a woman were ever to appear before him, he could be certain she would be snapped up by a more wealthy, muscular or articulate male. Yet here she was.

And when she claimed to love him, he felt an adolescent thrill, square as he knew this reaction to be in an adult.

But . . .

"I feel complimented," he told her gently. "But I have to point out that there are sharp limits—"

"No. No limits. And we have only forty minutes. Please, Mr. Fowler, we have to get started." She sat down on the coverlet and removed her shoes. One thigh showed alluringly as her leg lifted.

He chucked her under the chin with a careful finger. "There has to be a misunderstanding, sweetheart. You're very pretty and I like you but—maybe you'd better tell me exactly what you mean by 'making love.' "

She stood up. She ran a hand down her side and her yellow dress fell open. She shrugged out of it, folded it meticulously (he liked that, too) and stood before him in bra and petticoat. She drew the petticoat over her head.

"I fear our definitions coincide," Burg said quickly. It was as though a real woman were baring herself and he wasn't used to it. "But—surely you see that it's impossible. Physically impossible. You and I—well, it's impossible."

"No, it isn't," she said confidently as she reached behind to unfasten the bra. "You're a man and I'm a woman and I love you." The bra came free, revealing that spectacular scale-model bosom. Then she dropped her panties.

Ah, yes—complete and desirable in every respect.

And nine inches tall.

"Now it's your turn," she said.

"Look, Minnie—this is ridiculous. I can't—"

"Please, Mr. Fowler!" she urged him. "Get undressed."

"You don't understand—"

She dabbed her face with a handkerchief the size of a postage stamp. "You don't love me! You won't even give me a ch-chance!"

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Feeling like both fool and heel, he removed his pajamas. Of all the ways to be spending a Saturday morning!

"Good," she said looking him over demurely. "Now lie down."

He lay on his back next to her.

She trotted up and leaned against his chin. "You haven't shaved."

"I'll go take care of it right now," he said, grateful for the pretext to remove himself from this embarrassing charade.

"No—there isn't time. Kiss me," she said, and leaned over his face to plant her full red lips against his mouth. Her breasts nudged his cheek and she had one bare foot braced in his ear, but the overall effect, oddly, was potent.

Then she climbed up a little more so that her breasts hung above his mouth. Suddenly some more of the poem popped into his mind: Queen Helen's commentary on her own physique.

Yea, for my bosom here I sue:/ (O Troy Town!)/ Thou must give it where 'tis due,/ Give it there to the heart's desire./ Whom do I give my bosom to?/ (O Troy's down,/ Tall Troy's on fire!)

It was given to Burg. The breasts pressed down between his lips, their miniature nipples touching his tongue. He couldn't help warming to the sensual impact of her body.

He licked the heart's desire.

"You do want me, don't you?" she inquired.

What could he say? He was drinking from Helen's goblet and Tall Troy was on fire.

4. Expedition

The Thoughtsman for the *ad hoc* Expeditionary Committee presented his report. *We divided our mission into two prime areas of endeavor: first, the arrangements for the emissary to solicit a suitable exchange; second, the mechanical provisions for transfer of the shipment. Both areas had unique problems. We could not send one of our own number as emissary, for reasons hitherto discussed, so we formulated a matrix of suitable configuration and cultured it remotely to serve in lieu of direct confrontation. The proteins for the multicellular entity were garnered from the substances available on that world—*

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Several interjections: *Multicellular entity? Why attempt such an unwieldy construction? Surely there is a less tedious way!*

The Thoughtsman waited for the commentary to subside. *Compatriots, our need is massive and immediate. We felt that our purpose would best be served by dealing with one of the larger species, one capable of delivering the entire shipment in a matter of hours. If our present, admittedly ambitious, scheme succeeds, we should have complete delivery by the terminus of this Assembly.*

There was a complimentary aura of awe.

Then another protest: *But at what price, Thoughtsman? We shall have to mortgage our entire resources for a thousand generations even to approach a fair exchange for such immediate service!*

Not so, the Thoughtsman replied. *We need only agree to mutually beneficial terms. In this case we believe our emissary will be able to give satisfactory value. Therefore the shipment should cost us nothing more than the effort of obtaining it.*

But we cannot offer in exchange any information about ourselves or deriving from our researches! What else, apart from physical goods, could the emissary arrange for?

Love, the Thoughtsman replied.

5. Act of Love

Minnie trotted down Burg's chest, stomach and abdomen, her bare feet pattering ticklishly. When she reached the major biforcation she kneeled in the brush, wrapped her arms about the cannon she found there, and pressed her resiliant breasts against it.

Troy had never stood taller.

In the living room the clock chimed eight.

This abrupt reminder of the real world brought the weirdness of the situation home to him with renewed force. There was of course no mini-woman; he was lying steeped in his own concupiscence and he had better get up before he fouled the sheet. It had been a fabulous fantasy, ridiculous but exciting—but there were limits.

"You'll have to sit up, Mr. Fowler," she said. "The angle is wrong, this way."

Burg lifted his head and saw her: a lushly naked woman strad-

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dling the canting trunk of a leaning beech tree as though it were a seesaw.

He sat up carefully, swinging his gross feet off the side of the bed while she clung to her support with arms and legs. He didn't know what to do except comply with her requests; the truth was too incredible to argue with.

"Give me your hand," she said.

He put out a hand and she braced herself against his thumb. She climbed just high enough to sit on the apex of the now-vertical stump, her slim legs coming down on either side. He could feel her smooth muscular buttocks and the moist warmth of her cleft as she squirmed around to seat herself firmly, facing him. Her waist was no larger than the purple hassock she bestrode.

She squirmed some more and the action was almost painfully titillating. He began to comprehend how physical intercourse could take place between them: her aperture, properly positioned, might match and seal over the vent in the hydrant.

Burg closed his eyes and let her proceed as she wished. Astonishingly, this enhanced the sensation; it felt as though she were gradually enclosing him. Tip, glans, stem, stage by stage. This was utterly impossible; Minnie's entire torso was hardly four inches long.

He felt the ejaculation coming on—but that brought him to his senses again. So there was a doll-woman perched on the tower; accepting that much, the force of the incipient eruption would surely skewer her. That would not be funny at all. He remembered reading about one of the Nazi atrocities. They had taken one of the death-camp inmates, a young girl, forced the nozzle of a fire-hose into her vagina, tied it in place and turned the water on full force. That image made him recoil all over; it applied too specifically.

"Mr. Fowler!" Minnie cried.

Burg opened his eyes, then his mouth. The girl was squatting in his lap—and tall Troy was into her a good three inches, yet her torso retained its original and delectable dimensions. It was as though his substance vanished once it penetrated her.

"Mr. Fowler—you're shrinking."

So he was; that torture-image and now his amazement at what he saw had taken the starch from his ardor.

"Look, Minnie—what if I should—?"

"We only have a few minutes," she said reproachfully. "You can't fail me now."

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Detumescence continued, however, and her whole body tilted to one side as her support became jelly.

"But the—where will it go?" he demanded academically. What did not come, could not go. "You'll be—hurt."

She brought her knees together, putting pressure on the portion of him that remained within her. His flesh responded mechanically to the kneading of her well-formed limbs and began to grow again.

"Minnie, don't you know what happens when—"

"When the semen comes? Of course I know. And it has to be within five minutes or it's all wasted. Please, Mr. Fowler—you have to help, you know."

He saw his member expanding enormously under this stimulation, pushing back into the space between her thighs. She bounced her body, taking in yet more of him. Penetration was back to three inches and still she flexed her legs and slid farther down the tower.

Burg made a last effort to get through to her intellectually before the automatic process took over. "Minnie, there's going to be a lot of—pressure. Are you sure you have—room?"

"Do you love me?" she asked.

So even dream-girls had feminine foibles. "Yes, I—I guess I do. It's crazy and backwards—but I love you. You're my ideal, Minnie, in miniature."

"I'm so glad," she said, smiling. "And I love you, Burg." She was finally using his first name, as though his confession of love justified an intimacy of address that the prior circumstance had not. "And will you let me keep everything that comes?"

"It's a love offering," he said. "The truest kind. You can keep all you can hold, now and forever."

"Shake on it?" She proffered a doll-like hand.

He put out his right forefinger and she grasped the fingernail and tugged it solemnly up and down. They could not shake hands properly, he thought, but they could fornicate. What next?

"Then it's all right," she said. "Thank you, Burg."

And she straightened out both legs in an L-formation, scissored them wide and slid pneumatically down as though his manhood were a greased piston. Her dainty bottom landed warmly against his scrotum.

Her four-inch torso had absorbed him—yet remained as slender and virginal as ever. *(Please turn to page 155)*

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SERUM SOB

James Bassett

THE world welcomed the twenty-first century by a general pause in warfare, which might have been a coincidence—or which might have been fatigue. At the time almost no one knew that medical science had isolated the virus of human ill-nature. The discovery had been made by an obscure professor of psychosomatic medicine, Dr. Hewitt Osborne Tabory, of equally obscure Markworth University in Markwort, Iowa. He had been en-

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gaged on the problem since graduating from John Hopkins in 1973.

Even more remarkable than Dr. Tabory's basic find, however, was his development of a serum capable of neutralizing the virus, which he had named V-SOB.

A man of judgment and conservatism, in spite of his revolutionary find, Tabory had hesitated for a decade about announcing the results of his secret research. He wanted to be sure. He had seen the tragedy of premature disclosures, such as the abortive cancer cure of 1983. He wished at all cost to avoid such a catastrophe in something as important as his serum (S-SOB). Dr. Tabory had other reasons for caution.

During the entire experimental period his sole confidante was his wife, Stella, who also served as his guinea pig. With the nervous courage found only in women who marry minor college professors, she submitted in 1991 to the first recorded inoculation of S-SOB.

From that day forth, Stella Tabory was, to quote her wondering friends, a "changed woman." Her manic-depressive temper, which had made her an unpredictable, often unpleasant companion, vanished overnight. Even at faculty teas, during the ensuing nine years Mrs. Tabory was a model of docility, gentleness and Christian endeavor of a sort unparalleled even in the halls of the Christian Endeavor Society itself.

She never really knew what had happened to her. For that one, pioneering injection (300 c.c.) of S-SOB completely wiped out all trace of suspicion she might otherwise have displayed about her husband's real motives in permitting her to try the serum.

Soon thereafter Dr. Tabory was able to effect a highly satisfactory liaison with a pneumatic blonde named Ellen Taswell, secretary to Markwort's President Vincent Ambruster. Faculty gossips, who had not been inoculated with S-SOB, became quickly aware of the affair and almost as quickly sought to acquaint Stella with the juicy details. But she declined to believe them.

It was noted by some with wonderment that she refused even to make the time-honored countercharge of "malicious falsehoods."

No. Stella simply would not, or could not, comprehend that Professor Tabory, Miss Taswell or the baffled gossips were capable of evil deeds or ignoble thoughts.

EMBOLDENED by his initial success, which was not inconsiderable when viewed through the eyes of President Ambruster, who

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secretly coveted Miss Taswell himself, Dr. Tabory moved six months later toward greener, lusher pastures.

His calculating gaze fell upon a certain associate professor's wife, known to undergraduates as "Hot Stuff" Sanderson and famed as Markwort's 1997 Homecoming Queen. She had wed young Dr. Harry Sanderson, a biologist, under peculiar circumstances shortly before commencement that year. Several seniors breathed sighs of relief. One football halfback, who had taken a mysterious leave-of-absence the previous spring, returned to school after the nuptials.

The mating was an odd one and nobody seemed more surprised by it than Dr. Sanderson himself, whose air of astonishment appeared to increase each time he surveyed his bride's nubile form. Finally he went to Professor Tabory for some fatherly advice.

"Obviously," said the medico kindly, "you were unaware that this young woman suffered, as a student, from 'hysterical pregnancy.' This is not unusual among highly emotional females."

"But it can be damned embarrassing," said Dr. Sanderson.

"Quite."

Young Harry, the older man explained, was the thirteenth Markwortian charged by Hot Stuff with fathering a purely hypothetical child. And whereas the close-knit brethren along Fraternity Row had been able to elude matrimony by threatening exposure of her amours with all of them, Dr. Sanderson had been, in a word, stuck. All through his academic life both as a student and as a teacher, he had been a non-fraternity barbarian. He had no Greek comrades to bail him out.

During his counseling of Dr. Sanderson, the discoverer of S-SOB saw much of the young scholar's wife. In due course Professor Tabory selected Harry Sanderson as Subject Number Two.

Harry was inoculated.

Late one night, after Dr. Sanderson had fallen asleep on their Hollywood couch, Hot Stuff herself wielded the hypodermic. Kindly Dr. Tabory had assured her it would cure Harry's snoring.

In a way it did. At all events, Mrs. Sanderson was no longer bothered by her husband's unfortunate habit, for she began spending her nights with the discoverer of S-SOB. Blissfully, the newly de-SOB'd associate professor slept alone. And liked it. He now liked everything.

As Dr. Tabory's sense of power grew, so did his ambition. He began to glimpse breathtaking vistas of worldwide goodliness. He

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also glimpsed other vistas, mainly of beautiful and available damsels, among whom he could dawdle at will. The prospect was lovely.

But Dr. Tabory's small laboratory was capable of producing only a few thousand cubic centimeters of S-SOB daily. A normal inoculation demanded 300 c.c. Young Dr. Sanderson, far gone in naive decency to begin with, had required a scant 200 c.c.—but he was an exception. For the doctor's purposes, an almost unimaginably large quantity of the serum would have to be manufactured. Only a facility such as Hanford, Washington or Oak Ridge, Tennessee, was equipped to handle the job.

As A.D. 2000 dawned, Dr. Tabory made a difficult decision.

He packed his simulated-leather two-suiter and went to Washington, D.C., to lay the matter before the National Security Resources Board. After considerable heel-cooling in outer vestibules of the NSRB, where he became acquainted with all manner of pert, well-rounded young PBX operators, Dr. Tabory was admitted to the inner sanctum of the agency's chief of research, Dr. Ronald Entwhistle, a dollar-a-year man who managed to live comfortably from the sales of *his* serum, which cured the common cold.

Patiently Dr. Tabory explained his mission. He exhibited his formula. And he beseeched Federal assistance for a nationwide S-SOB program.

Dr. Entwhistle said, "My good man, it is quite obvious that you are unaware of the terrible implications of your discovery—if, indeed, it is a discovery at all."

"Implications?"

"Yes. Suppose we were to anaesthetize the SOB tendencies of every living American. What then? As a country suddenly bereft of its common sense and dedicated practically overnight to Good Samaritanism, don't you imagine we'd fall easy prey to any nation that had not accepted S-SOB?"

"I see," said Dr. Tabory sadly.

Dr. Entwhistle continued in a kindlier tone: "But there is a possibility. An outside chance."

"And that is?"

"The UN. Try them. They might be able to sell your scheme on a global basis, provided, of course, the Russians agreed."

With NSRB aid Dr. Tabory arranged an audience with Handel Liebensraum, executive secretary to the UN's special projects board at their Manhattan headquarters. He was granted exactly twelve

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minutes, starting at precisely 11:31 a.m. on April 16, 2000.

For the first ten minutes of the momentous conference, singularly unimpressed, Liebensraum appeared far more interested in picking his nose, cleaning his fingernails and mentally disrobing his Czechoslovakian stenographer, Miss Jan Bata, than in assimilating the data offered by his calm-voiced visitor. Dr. Tabory was not unaware of this. He, too, found Miss Bata enjoyable.

So, just as the UN aide began making significant motions toward the fourteen huge clocks on the wall—which told the time simultaneously in all the world's principal capitals—the doctor took a desperate step.

He revealed to Liebensraum why he knew S-SOB worked, by detailing his successful experiments with Stella and the husband of Hot Stuff Sanderson.

The UN man snapped to attention.

"You may," he said to Miss Bata, "leave the room. And please to close the door. *Bitte.*"

TWO days later Handel Liebensraum realized his heart's desire. He had a date with Miss Bata. A hugely successful one. And his chief, a beetle-browed Pole named Frederic Bugz, became strangely mellow, affable and easy to please. Somebody actually saw Bugz smiling—somebody else reported, with a measure of bewilderment, that the erstwhile Fierce Freddie had whistled snatches from the *Warsaw Concerto* in the gentlemen's room on the thirty-seventh floor of the UN building.

More to the astonishing point, Bugz seemed to take no umbrage whatsoever at Liebensraum's expropriation of his longtime cocktail-and-afterhours companion, Miss Bata.

And Bugz personally presented the S-SOB proposal to the Security Council on April 19, precisely two hundred and twenty-five years after Paul Revere saddled his steed in Boston Town.

More personality miracles occurred. Jakob Komroff, the Russian delegate who had been expected to interpose angry objections to the worldwide de-SOBing plan turned out to be surprisingly tractable.

"If this is what the majority wishes," said Comrade Komroff, "then we agree."

Some UN observers noted with mingled astonishment and a trace

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of suspicion that the Russian delivered his brief message in perfect English. Previously he had conducted the USSR's negotiations in his mother tongue and it had been widely believed he spoke no other language.

But there was no cause for suspicion.

Jakob Komroff, as did Frederic Bugz, owed his new amiability to a surreptitious shot of S-SOB, self-administered. Liebensraum, who knew his chief's diabetic condition, had substituted S-SOB one morning for the Pole's routine insulin. With Komroff, the problem was solved by hiring a heroin peddler named One-Eye Gindle to insinuate a packet of the serum into the Russian's weekly narcotics shipment.

BY JUNE of that fateful year energetic UN teams had established S-SOB stations in the largest cities of all five continents, including one deep in Australia's Never-Never Land, where atomic experimentation centered. Autumn found the missions in towns, villages and hamlets. And before ice formed on the Volga UN task forces (called "SOB brothers" or "SOB sisters," depending on sex) were combing the hinterlands in search of uninoculated strays.

Dr. Tabory assumed overall direction of this mammoth enterprise.

Tireless, enthusiastic and fearless even when whole nations rose in arms over Operation K (for "kindness"), as it was officially designated, the slender gray scientist personally shepherded the entire chore. No detail escaped him. He took special pride in wielding the hypodermic needle on the SOB brethren and sisters himself.

His greatest public triumph was the mass injection of the entire UN membership in Radio City Music Hall on the night of December 24, 2000.

And on New Year's Eve Dr. Tabory flew, with his now-famed black leather medical kit, down to Washington, D.C., for an inoculation festival starring the President, his Cabinet, and Congress.

After that his presence was much in demand in the world's capitals. No ruler—from the Kremlin to Djakarta—felt he had been properly anti-SOB'd unless Dr. Tabory himself handled the syringe. Even the staff advisers of these kings, rajahs, dictators, presidents, prime ministers, premiers, sultans, pandits, chieftains and emperors had to have the Tabory Touch.

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SHORTLY after the Volga unfroze in May of the portentous year 2001, Frederic Bugz announced at a high level UN meeting that, at long last, Operation K was finished. Dr. Tabory was present at the conference as guest of honor. When the applause ended, he arose.

"This," he said, "is splendid news. Truly splendid." He paused almost imperceptibly. "But are you quite sure you have missed nobody?"

"Quite," said Bugz, proudly.

Then the delegate from Pakistan, after apologizing in advance for his unworthy doubts, asked timidly, "What about the offspring of all these people, Dr. Tabory? Will they not revert—to the sort of inhumanity from which we have now been rescued?"

The scientist smiled. "Gentlemen, you may rest assured. My tests prove beyond question that children of S-SOB'd parents acquire goodness by inheritance."

"Then the world is saved," cried the Pakistani.

"Yes," said Dr. Tabory simply.

Russia's Jakob Komroff wiped a tear from his left eye. Another, larger, tear ran unnoticed down his grizzled cheek and came to rest, twinkling like a Czarist jewel, at the tip of his nobly Russian moustache.

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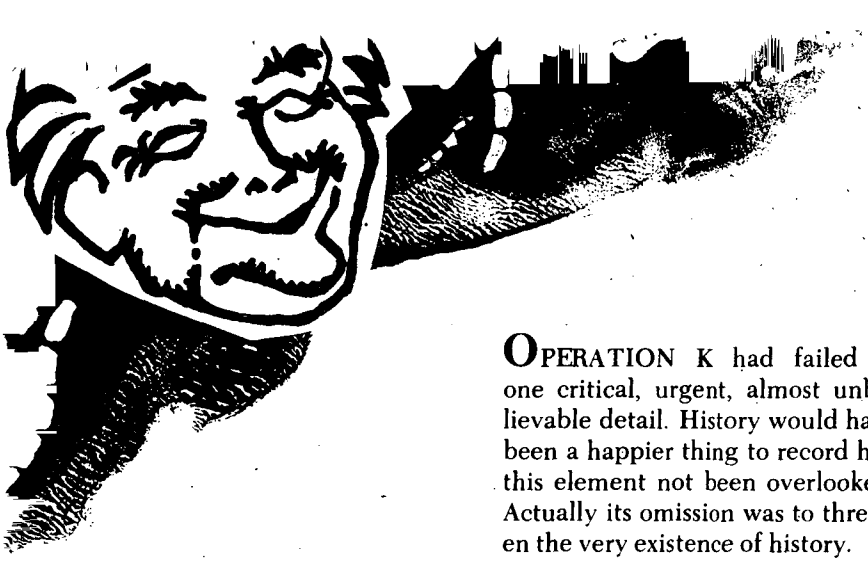

OPERATION K had failed in one critical, urgent, almost unbelievable detail. History would have been a happier thing to record had this element not been overlooked. Actually its omission was to threaten the very existence of history.

Nobody had thought to inoculate Dr. Tabory—or perhaps his associates assumed that he, long since, had taken the S-SOB treatment.

This fatal error was no oversight on the scientist's part. He had planned it that way. Now that Operation K had concluded, no living soul remained among the world's brotherly-loving inhabitants to raise the finger of suspicion against Old Dr. SOB, as he had affectionately come to be known.

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From his position as adviser-extraordinary to the UN the crafty doctor found it a comparatively simple matter to vault to even loftier eminences. First he became the United States' UN delegate. Tiring of that, weary of the delightful feminine companionship with which the vast chromium-and-granite headquarters abounded, Dr. Tabory permitted his name to be offered at the Presidential convention of the combined Democratic-Republican Party in 2004. The two-party system had died a placid death during the Era of Good Feeling immediately following Operation K two years earlier.

He was elected without a dissenting vote—for life.

But even power palls eventually. Bored with the never-ending, infernal niceness of people in general, Dr. Tabory sought diversion. Still hale in his late fifties, he nevertheless had begun to sense a certain letdown in his personal life, a dwindling of his quondam unflagging energy, an inability to forget his train of thought at the sight of well-filled nylon or an impudently tilted breast.

Early one morning, sleepless after too much coffee and too many Havanas, Dr. Tabory found the answer to his dreary dilemma. Reluctantly for a man long accustomed to absolute dominance over all his kind, he decided upon war.

BY APPEALING to the S-SOB'd Americans' innate decency, with particular emphasis on their childlike faith in goodness, Dr. Tabory convinced them that Russia, somehow, had escaped complete S-SOB inoculation during Operation K. With unfaltering credulity the United States accepted his analysis of this new world situation, which he outlined in a Hearthside Chat on the fateful evening of March 3, 2008.

By July of that same year the long-dormant U.S. Defense Department was reactivated. The fleet emerged from mothballs. Warplanes were restored to airworthiness. The National Guard, long known as the Big Brother of the Boy Scouts of America, and more accustomed to fourteen-mile hikes than to combat, was given rifles, bazookas, mortars, flamethrowers and atomic tanks.

In the Old Days regiments of publicity men had been necessary to whip up popular sentiment for war. Causes were sought, trumpeted and drilled into an initially dubious citizenry.

Now the situation was different.

For this was a holy crusade. Dr. Tabory, if anything, had to restrain the ardor of his burgeoning forces.

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In the small hours of the lonely nights and in the secret recesses of his lonely mind the scientist knew that his coming war would be simple slaughter, since the unarmed Russians, their military instincts deadened by S-SOB, neither anticipated an attack nor had the means to withstand it. Fortunately—or, perhaps, unfortunately—his kinder nature prevailed. He decided to give the enemy a fighting chance.

On August 27, with the admiring consent of his War Cabinet, Dr. Tabory flew personally to Moscow to negotiate with the "unbelievers."

He remained in Soviet Territory for three whirlwind weeks. During this brief period he worked a major miracle by returning that sprawling, peaceful nation to a full war footing.

By mid-October Armageddon was upon the world.

FROM his command center in the Pentagon, cleverly utilizing two different strategic staffs whose duties were never even suspected by, much less known to, each other, Dr. Tabory waged global war like a man playing chess with himself.

He ordered the oxygen bomb dropped on New York, Moscow, London, Paris, San Francisco, Vienna, Budapest, Tokyo, Detroit and Shanghai. When the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce was quoted in the local papers as wondering why that Southland paradise wasn't as good a target as Detroit, Dr. Tabory quickly obliged. Los Angeles was obliterated on November 12.

Washington, D.C., of course, was spared.

And yet, as the dreadful havoc grew and the O-bomb carnage mounted, so did the ultimate danger to the globe itself. Gradually the upper atmosphere thickened with deadly particles. Inevitably this fearsome hail returned to the tortured earth, destroying everything and everyone it touched. First such hitherto unharmed cities as Des Moines, Iowa, Vladivostok, Brisbane, Australia and Antofagasta, Chile, began reporting radiation deaths. Only a few; then more and more and more—and finally, silence.

Silence, too, in the Pentagon.

For, on February 3, 2009, shortly before dinner time in the massive underground warren where Dr. Tabory labored with his diabolically conceived joint staffs, the terrible rain filtered down over the U.S. capital.

The last words ever uttered by mortal man, and who's to doubt

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this, were spoken by Dr. Hewitt Osborne Tabory, lately of Markwort University, to his dining companion, a Miss Marilyn Zastro of the Defense Department's secretarial pool, as the ghastly fog snatched at his ancient throat.

"It might," he croaked, "have been different—"

And then he fell dead across Miss Zastro's already stiffening body.

∞

WORLDS OF FANTASY

FEATURED IN THE CURRENT ISSUE:

Teddy Bear

JAMES E. GUNN

Walker Between the Planes

GORDON R. DICKSON

Last Night and Every Night

JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

WATCH FOR IT ON YOUR NEWSSTAND!

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TELL ME

Edward Y. Breese

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AS ALL space-loners do, Jess-ev-an talked to himself and to his ship and sometimes to the stars. It was natural enough for him to greet the shining green-and-blue planet which housed Galaxy Central Control when it swam into view on his vision screen.

"Hello, Home," he told his world. "You're beautiful as ever, Home."

His one-man, ultra-long-range planet scout slowed and came in gracefully—a snowflake on the wind—to standby orbit on the fringe of gravity.

She was not a handsome ship. As starships go, to anyone but Jess, she was ugly, a dull gray, roughly ovoid lump, rough-surfaced to resemble a great boulder on the face of any Home-type planet she might find. The Battle Fleet were soot-black bullets at incredible velocity. The passenger liners were crimson and the freighters blue —both trimmed in the colors of their Line and Sector. Only the scout was as ugly as an asteroid.

On the other hand, only the scout could stay out a hundred years on the far fringe frontiers—the Never-Never Sectors where the edge-of-galaxy whisps out like flung foam into empty space. In planet or in overdrive she was faster than anything else that swam in space. Her conversion units were small but designed to operate indefinitely under any environment that had yet been encountered. Her sting could cripple a battle cruiser or sterilize a planet face.

Scout captains are as special as their ships. Once the People discovered the technique of cell-regeneration which is the secret of near-immortality, they had plenty of time to train a man in any skills and to any degree desired. Scout captains are end-products of the ultimate training schools. Each one outranks fleet admirals or sector governors wherever encountered.

As soon as Jess' signal was picked up he was called in for landing with top priority clearance. Within minutes the ship was in her cradle behind Security Barriers and he was walking the half mile to the Interrogation Building.

The walk was traditional. Plenty of comfortable vehicles were available but a chance to walk freely under blue skies in the sunshine of Home was joy beyond measure to a prisoner of space. To a degree it met his keenly whetted hunger for planet-freedom, so that Interrogation found the captains vastly more cooperative as a result.

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General Bil-brand-on was waiting for Jess in the pleasant conference room. The windows opened wide to a warm wind. Flowers bloomed in ceramic tubs both within the room and on the gallery outside. The chairs were deep and soft.

"Hello, Bil," Jess said. He put his attache case on the library table which substituted for a desk. "It's all here on microfilm. The records, maps, tri-di photos—everything you could ask. The samples and artifacts are crated and ready to unload."

"Of course," the general said. "You fellows never miss. Sit down, Jess, and relax." He leaned forward, picked up a crystal carafe and poured goblets of The Drink beyond compare.

JESS poured the ritual three drops of libation to all Life upon one of the growing plants and then drank deep. The clear, sweet water of Home (unmatched Galaxy-wide) refreshed the deepest shadows of his being.

The ceremony done, he turned to business again. "Computer forecast was correct again," he said. "There was a Home-type planet around that sun as predicted."

"An unlikely spot," the general commented.

"True enough," Jess said. "Clear across the heart of Galaxy and out toward a spiral tip where the suns become thin dust in space. All the same, there it was—and crawling with Life from pole to pole."

"Humanoids of course?"

"Of course. Evolutionary level at Mammalian Stage Seven. Culture well along. Cities, ships, trade. It's all in there." He indicated the attache case. "In a couple of particularly favorable spots on the main continental land mass Type-Four empires are growing rapidly."

General Bil-brand-on was impressed—as Jess had known he would be.

"Fours eh? That could be dangerous."

"It will be," Jess promised him. "The humanoids are highly competitive and aggressive. As groups they seize and defend well marked territories."

"Technology?"

"Most advanced in Type-Four artifacts—weapons for offense and defense. The bulk of the planet is still illiterate but the empires have bows, iron swords, tactical discipline and some fairly sophisti-

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cated heavy missile weapons. Once they find a power source more advanced than chattel slavery, they'll go far."

"How far do you think, Jess?"

"Just as far as you do, General. Maybe even this far. At the rate they're going those fellows will have some sort of interplanet rocketry inside a lifetime—a couple of thousand years at the outside. Or I'm no judge."

"You're the best judge we have," the general said. "I know that as well as you do." He poured them each a drink from a carafe that held something more potent than water. "How sure are you, Jess?"

Jess felt the amber fluid burn his stomach. "Too sure, I'm afraid, sir. I was there for thirty-three of their years. Time enough to survey the civilized areas, learn the chief languages and mix with their people. I had a good look into their minds." He shrugged. "I'm sorry I did. They're our cousins under the skin, General. In time they'll break out. As soon as their shamans figure what the stars really are—they'll find a way."

The general sighed. "I wish Supreme Authority would let us send in the fleet to lance that sort of boil and sterilize the planet. The Rights of Primitives Directives make our job a lot harder than it should be. If only it were we, not the Priests, who had His Supremacy's real confidence."

"It may be for the best we don't," Jess said. "If we once start burning out planets, we'll think we're gods. Besides, space is too big to spare a race. Who knows what'll come at us across the deeps from other galaxies? We humanoids have to help, instead of murder, each other."

THE general finished his drink. "I'd forgotten you fellows were half priests yourselves," he said. "You may be right—but right or wrong, we'll do it by the book. Did you manage to give them the Word of Peace while you were there?"

"Oh, yes," Jess said. "At least I tried before I left. I picked the nation that seemed most aware of matters spiritual and went among them for three years. They knew little about psi. I managed a most impressive show and recruited a group of followers. I had hopes the rest would prove receptive."

"And weren't they?"

For answer, Jess held out his hands palms up. The regenerative process and the medication had almost, but not quite as yet, oblit-

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erated the triangular scar in the center of each hand. "I've another of these through each foot too," he said.

The general looked shocked. "Crucifixtion!" he said. "So that was their answer?"

"The answer of their power elite at least," Jess said. "You must remember my teachings were really rocking the boat as far as they were concerned. I wasn't really surprised—just relieved that they didn't want to behead me. If they had, I'd have had to choose between dying or cutting out and blowing the whole show."

"What would you have done? Or am I a fool to ask?"

"I don't really know," Jess said. "Life is good—but remember, I was trained. I knew I might have to die for the good of some portion of humanity. Anyway, I'm glad I didn't have to make the choice."

"How did you handle it?"

"Easily enough. When their johnnies were nailing me up I went into deep trance with a reserve block to wake me if my body was handled too badly. I didn't need that. This bunch neither cremates nor embalms its dead. I woke up in a cave tomb, as expected, and walked out. Most of my followers had cut and run for the hills, of course, but I looked up a few and talked to them—mostly for a shock effect so they wouldn't forget me."

The general roared with laughter. "I'll bet they don't forget you or your message after that. Tell me—think it did any good?"

"That's hard to tell right now, General. You'll have to mark the planet for periodic check and cultural evaluation. Maybe our children will know the answer. I managed at least to plant a seed. It may or may not sprout. The whole future of their race—maybe of all the People—can hang on what those poor devils of disciples of mine do."

"We'll watch them," the general said. "Now suppose I turn you over to the staff for routine debriefing. After that take six months with your family."

"Of course. There's nothing I'd rather do."

"Oh, one more thing. When you're rested a bit, get in touch with me. I've orders from His Supremacy that when you're checked in I'm to take you to New Washington for a personal conference. Confidentially, boy, you're to be given the Conmedal of service."

"It's an honor," Jess said. "But the real reward is just to be safe back on Earth." ∞

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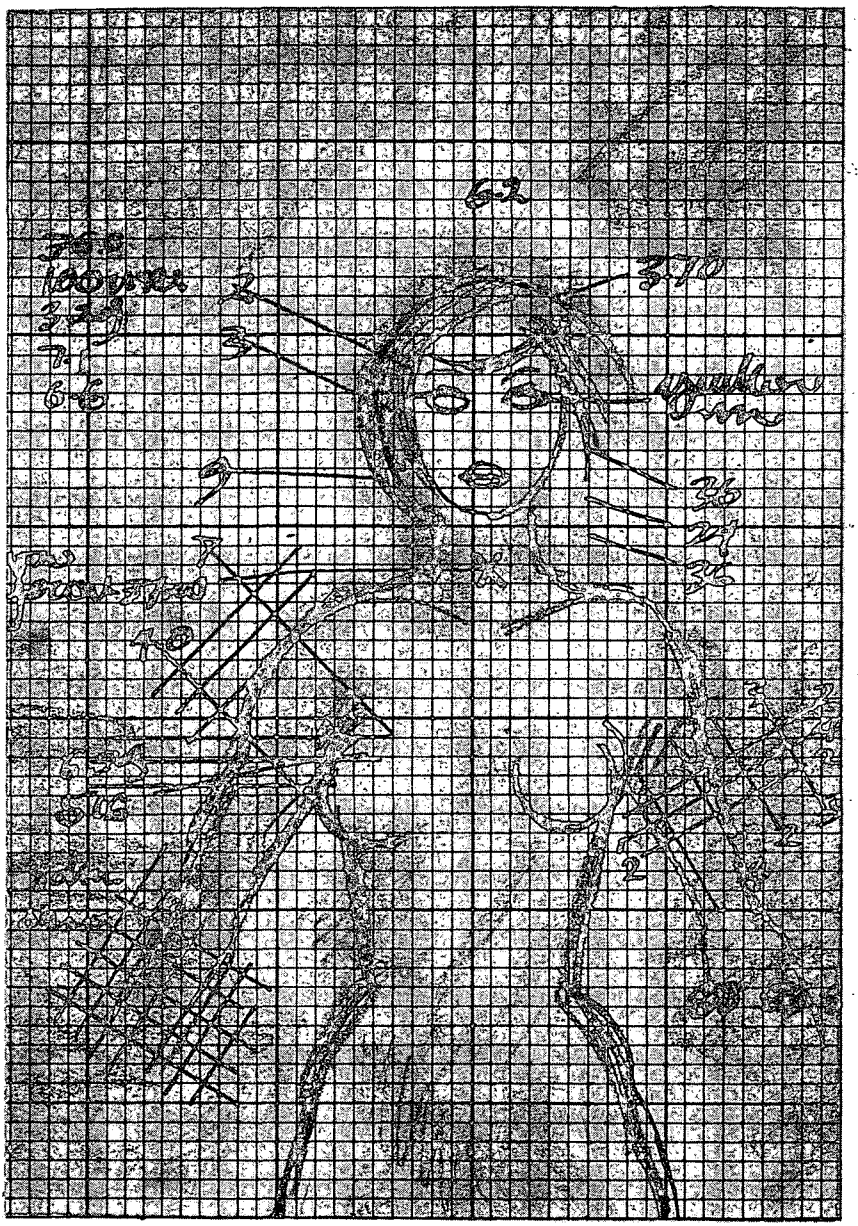

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THE STATE VS. SUSAN QUOD

Noel Loomis

I

EVEN though I made love to her all over my thirty-acre retreat in the mountains of Maryland, from the golden shag rug in front of the fireplace to the top of the big boulder from which we could see half the valley, I didn't know she was an android. She was tall, stately, firm of flesh—oh, how firm of flesh—quick and graceful in movement and strong past all belief. Her black hair glistened even in the moonlight—especially in the moonlight—while the mid-morning sun built fires in her golden skin and the secret places of her body. Her waist was very small, her breasts heavy but upstanding. She had beautiful little round buttocks as smooth as baking-powder biscuits and her eyes were the deep blue of an iridescent butterfly's wing.

And she an android—but I didn't know that until later.

You must understand that at the time of this writing—A.D. 2560—androids are a problem in the culture. Robots have long since passed into obsolescence (a robot being a sort of welded-steel piece of machinery that acted like a man but looked like a molecular model of a nineteenth-century washtub) because androids were so clever in their responses and in their movements (an android being a sort of robot made to look

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like a human being as well as act like one.)

Early in this century the line between androids and humans became a fine one.

The fact was that androids were certainly humanoid, and there was the usual movement to declare them human and give them all human rights, with the usual resistance from the diehards.

On the inside, androids are different. An android is filled with miniaturized controls but its circuitry can be detected only through examination by X-ray or fluoroscope—although some of the more advanced models have internal camouflage to fool even an expert, short of surgical inspection.

Susan was obviously an advanced model—a very advanced model.

Her construction was not, of course, a really new idea for the twenty-sixth century. Even before A. D. 2000 some slightly aberrant men had made artificial women who could give them all the delights of physical acquiescence without any of the problems of personality. It does not seem, at this distance, that such facilities could have been too satisfactory—but that was how they did things in those strange days. Perhaps those pitiful early attempts led to the modern android.

Starting in 2510 a number of interesting lawsuits were fought over androids and today, to most intents and purposes, the android is a living human being—but with a great deal of turmoil still attached to the topic.

Old barristers will recall the Case of *Crown* vs. *Witherspoon* in which a man named Witherspoon was charged with the murder of an android. The defense in that case was vigorous and the crown finally conceded that under the precedents of that day, the destruction of an android was not quite like the taking of a human life, since an android was actually a man-made machine and could not possibly have a soul. The appeals court agreed and noted, in passing that the creation of a soul was exclusively the province of God.

A few years later, however, the Atlantic Association of Androids signed a complaint against a man who had tossed his android from the seventy-second floor of the Omnipotent Service Tower in New York, and the fat was in the fire. The destroyed android was female, as had been the one that figured in the Witherspoon case. If androids could care enough about other androids to prosecute a

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man who had destroyed an android—who could argue that an android lacked a soul? (The case was *State vs. Dodson*).

PREDICTABLY, judicial processes were hampered by the difficulty of defining *soul*. Philosophers pointed out that paramecia at one time had been ancestors of Man and that surely nobody would say they had souls. But if a paramecium could eventually develop into a complicated creature like Man who would exhibit whatever it is that we know as soul, why not an android—a far more sophisticated machine to start with?

The court in *State vs. Dodson* evaded the crucial issue and the question was not considered again until a few years later in *Appleby vs. the City of New York*, when an android named Appleby sued the county attorney for forcing her (Appleby, too, was a female) to submit to the indignity of a fluoroscope. The court finally decided that—since androids were required by law to wear clothing and since this clothing was required to be either male or female according to the construction of the wearer—an android, like a human, had a right to privacy and could not be required to submit to a test of his or her vital organs unless he or she had been seen committing a felony.

During the trial the android soul had again been debated, opponents claiming no android had ever committed suicide. Man was the only animal that ever committed suicide, the argument ran. He did so because he had a soul, which at once rendered him more able to enjoy life and also made him much more sensitive to it. Again, however, the court's decision was notable for skirting the real issue.

By A.D. 2540, therefore, the status of androids was incompletely resolved. They were quasi-human beings and entitled to many human rights as long as they behaved. The question of a soul was still in a state of judicial limbo.

IT WAS strictly a felony for a human to use an android for sexual purposes. The world may never quite recover from the shock it received from old white-maned Senator Vauxhall, international president of the League for Sexual Morality, honorary secretary of the Committee for the Preservation of Human Mores, Doctor of Divinity, ex-minister and chairman of the Armed Services Committee. The Senator married a gorgeous eighteen-year-old sun

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moon blonde with all the equipment that gorgeous and nubile eighteen-year-olds usually have. During the festivities around Washington before and after the marriage the lubricious bride, Felicity, was popular with young officers and coveted by old ones. You could hardly blame them; I was attached to the President's office and therefore present at some of the social events. I met Felicity and I know it was all an ordinary man could do to keep his hands off her.

She was like a gorgeous ripe peach with the fuzz still on it. You knew she was full of juice but you wanted to squeeze her and find out for sure.

Naturally there was vulgar back-room speculation to the effect that the Senator, for all his senior-status vivacity, had more than met his match and would soon be reduced to an empty husk. No doubt every man who suggested that outcome was thinking that he could step into the breach and show Felicity what married life was really like—but it seems that they underestimated the Senator. After a year of this connubial heaven he was as fat and jolly as ever. Perhaps his eyes twinkled even more. The girl grew neither fatter nor slimmer. She stayed as she had been. The only change anybody could note was that she quit searching the eyes of every handsome single man with whom she came in contact.

One day the white-haried Senator, in his capacity of Armed Services Committee Chairman, went along on a routine diving test of a new submarine; a brave and vote-attracting thing for him to do, especially since he brought his bride.

The ship sprang a leak at thirty-eight thousand feet and stayed down for twenty years. When they finally recovered the corpses of the crew and the Senator and the gorgeous blonde, the crew and the Senator had been pretty well chewed by salt water. Felicity still looked fresh, ripe and nineteen.

Her lovely remains seemed to exhibit no effects of the long submersion. I know the examination was careful—for I attended. I represented the President. There was no real need for an autopsy, so they put her on a slab in the morgue—and after a day or two she came walking out.

The fact that an apparently dead blonde had come to life after twenty years' immersion in the deep ocean was enough to set the Navy back on its scuppers. She came out just as they had laid her on the slab—naked. Everybody in Washington wanted to be involved.

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How to corral that nubile little heifer without laying hands on her person? A rear admiral who arrived on the scene was heard to remark with some sarcasm that the Navy had not shown such efficiency in several hundred years. Two ensigns fought each other with bare fists for the privilege of lending Felicity some clothing. The day made naval history.

The upper echelons of the Navy, disgruntled, perhaps, because they had missed the stirring events in the morgue, began to realize that they were dealing with no ordinary corpse. They inquired into the humanity of her dependents, who had been drawing insurance pay for twenty years. The dependents, too, turned out to be androids. Since defrauding an insurance company was far worse than violating the sodomy laws, quite a stink rose over the whole business.

The girl—or girl android if you will—was the first to be decommissioned under the sodomy laws—a sad, sad day, while the Senator, wherever he was by that time, enjoyed a certain degree of diplomatic immunity. The case was *State vs. Felicity Vauxhall.*

There was the expected campaign to legalize marriage of androids but it came to nothing because androids had never been devised for anatomical reproduction—even though late-model males or females were made with considerable fidelity to the originals. Again the question was brought up of an android's ability to commit suicide, but the matter was ruled irrelevant to any such subject as reproduction.

IN THE midst of all these queries over the rights of a man-made machine, I met Susan Quod at a reception for the Tanzanian ambassador. It seemed possible—in fact likely—that Susan Quod had black blood. Her skin was dusky with darker hollows. Her eyes were large and liquid. She was stately, gracious and warm, the most striking brunette in Washington—in fact, the first beauty to make veteran Navy men forget the sight of Felicity Vauxhall emerging from the morgue. When I looked into Susan's eyes, all I could do was stare back.

My aide tugged at my sleeve. "Commander," he said, "are you all right?"

I didn't even look at him. "I'll never be all right again," I said, "until I have this magnificent woman in my arms."

She smiled, seemed to understand. Candor was the vogue. She

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said gracefully, "Commander, would you escort me to the punch-bowl?"

Putting negotiations under way.

She wore a white brocade gown, but so low in front that if her breasts had not been firm it would have gaped to her waist; and so low in the back that I could see the faint ripple of her backbone under the silky golden skin, down to the dimples at the base.

We went out to the terrace—the party was in the embassy's fortieth-floor suite and Susan was the ambassador's daughter—and looked at the lights of the city. My aide had discreetly remained at the punchbowl, trading compliments with the ambassador's French wife who was Susan's stepmother.

"Miss Quod," I said. "I am paid for never being at a loss for words—but right now I find it so difficult to catch my breath that I can hardly think—let alone talk."

It was true. My brain suffered from oxygen-starvation before that glorious piece of womanhood as if it had been a twelve-year-old's.

Susan Quod turned her magnificent eyes on me and moved her body slowly until she was profiled against the city sky.

I put my hands on her arms. "Are you married?"

She turned to face me. Her eyelids were lowered. "I have never been married," she said.

"Would you like to be?"

"I have thought about it but I have not been convinced."

Something scared me. Maybe she was frigid. "How old are you?"

She smiled. "Twenty-eight."

"You must have been married."

She was reading my mind and liking what she read. The light in her eyes said a great deal—enough to set me on fire. Her self-assured smile suggested hidden depths and smoldering warmth.

I resolved to ascertain some truths about her.

I knew I would need time, so I started at once. I put my arms around her. She did not pull away; neither did she respond.

My fingertips tingled where they touched her back and I began to pull her toward me.

She resisted a little but I kept the pressure on. In a moment she was against me. I seemed to be sensitive to every curve of her body—and there were many. I kissed her warm red lips and for a second they were alive—but she drew back as I had known she would.

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"Commander," she said, "your prerogatives hardly include the privilege of kissing me at a casual gathering."

I had an answer. "My position would never include the privilege of kissing you at all," I said, "but my status as a man compels me at least to try."

Her eyes were on me. "You were not very happy with that attempt," she said.

I reached for her again. "No—but I am going to be happy with this one."

And indeed I was. She came into my arms, all the warm length of her. Tall as she was, she seemed to fit against me from lips to toes. The exchange of psychic voltage between us would have blown any master controls. For a moment I trembled violently. I had kissed many presentable young women at Washington functions—but never before with this impact.

She had kissed me and I zoomed. I tried to be gentle but some emotional vulcanizing sealed our lips together until I could almost feel myself pulsing in her veins. It sounds a little weird, three years later, but that is the way it was. At one moment she held me off; at the next she was close. We were more than throbbing flesh against throbbing flesh. Far more. What we had, for just a moment, was the joining of two blood systems, two hearts, two minds in a flash of white light and a burst of consuming heat. When the giddiness passed I drew back and looked at her and began to react on my own. Indeed we were not one. We were two, a superb female and a virile male—and we both knew it.

AT TIMES during our courtship I thought she was deliberately tantalizing me to bring on a wedding ceremony. Distraught, frustrated by her unwillingness to commit herself, I would tell myself that she was a common garden-variety adventuress out to capture a husband. But I was wrong. I had the F.B.I. look into her background and discovered that she was directly descended from one of the first families of Tanzania—a family that had had its start back in the late 1800's before the African nations began to emerge. One of the world's wealthiest families—and also one of the most sensitive because its fortune had been established in colonial days. Susan most certainly was not an adventuress.

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I also began to believe that I had come into contact with a virgin. A hundred years ago, when the sophists controlled the mores of the world, I could not have entertained the notion. But in 2560 the public attitude toward sex had again reached an anthropological norm in its thousand-year cycle and again men had the courage to want exclusive possession of their chosen women.

During the time I was having Susan checked out I managed about one date a week with her. The family fortune had had its start in ivory and now had reached a size that could be speculated about but hardly estimated. Susan's parents had an entire penthouse floor in the clouds above Washington and that was where I would call for her. And Susan continued to take care of herself as though she had twin entities—one of them a strict chaperone.

She kissed, she hugged, she vibrated with passion but when I reached for her intimacies she disentangled herself and walked away. Among her favorite costumes was a shimmering silver dress slit on each side to her lovely thighs. She had long, strong, magnificently tapered legs. A man would have had to be marble not to try to put hands on them. On occasion she had allowed a brief and casual caress of her gorgeous breasts but I was permitted no lower than that. When I tried she dropped her arms and walked away. It took willpower not to beg.

One night at a lobster dinner in the Presidential dining room in the International Hotel I plied her with champagne and tried to talk her into something.

I said, "Susan, we've been seeing each other for three months and you've never let me do more than kiss you."

She looked at me. Her big liquid eyes were guileless.

"That's not enough?"

The Jezebel! She knew damned well it wasn't enough. In fact I had been so upset for two and a half months that the President had asked me if I needed a vacation—but how could I tell the President that a woman was driving me out of my mind?

I said, "Susan, you're twenty-eight years old. You must know what men are like."

She answered dreamily, "Yes, I know."

"Then quit teasing me."

She said earnestly, "Adam, I am not teasing you. If kissing is that painful for you, perhaps we had better stop."

For a second I thought I would like to choke that lovely throat.

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Hell, I *couldn't* stop kissing her! Her lips performed miracles in contact with mine. Everything indicated that she was as passionate as she looked but she had control. The situation was not easy.

II

FINALLY I had only one recourse. I asked her to marry me.

She did not consent at once, although I think as I write this that she was in almost as bad shape as I was. She gave her answer six weeks later. Her parents agreed and the wedding was set for November—six months away.

Mercifully, international affairs picked up about that time. Chile and Peru renewed an age-old rivalry and I was dispatched to the scene as an observer. During that month I discovered that I was in love, for I was as miserable away from her as with her. Being a man can be hell.

We cooled the Chileans and Peruvians and I flew back to Washington to report, slowing down over Costa Rica to take pictures of Irazu, which once again was erupting.

The President received me in the East Room. For a solid hour I briefed him and answered questions. Finally he leaned back and smiled.

"It's five o'clock and I'm sure you have a date with Miss Quod. Lovely, lovely girl." He looked at me, his mouth quirking. "Quite a number of years since I've felt like taking a bite out of a girl—but I remembered the urge when I met Susan."

I grinned. We understood each other pretty well. The President had been my admiral during the Antarctic crisis.

"Don't start filing your teeth," I said. "I'll do the biting for everybody."

He sobered. "I suppose you've had her classified. You know what would happen if you should marry an android."

"The Background Bureau has checked her out," I said.

"Nothing more personal than that?"

I shook my head. "Nobody but me is going to examine that body, sir."

He chuckled. "Short of surgery, we couldn't be sure anyway." He stood up and shook hands. "Thanks for the report. And by the way—"

"Yes, sir?"

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"That wasn't entirely an idle question." The President paused. "Three days ago our Security Squad discovered eight more Congressmen who seem to be androids."

I stared at him.

"Eight more, sir?"

"Yes."

The President was grave.

"What will be done with them?"

He shrugged. "They had passed as humans, so the state will have to bring decommission proceedings."

"I can't understand how they were discovered."

"About the only way it can happen—by accident." The President looked solemn. "Two members of the Science Party, both from the East, and three members of the Water Party from Arizona and Southern California were on a junket to Machu Picchu to examine the newly uncovered siphon system of the Incas. They left about a month after you went to South America. However, their pilot had a heart attack and rammed the plane into a mountain hidden by clouds." He paused. "Parts of the congressmen were scattered over the Andes Mountains. Eventually a Quechua shepherd left his llamas long enough to find a detached leg containing metallic circuits." The President smiled wryly. "He thought the former owner had been a strange sort of human—promptly went to Cuzco and told the whole story. Local hero of the day, I suppose. Anyway, four of those five congressmen turned out to have been androids. The news has shaken the inner councils of every government in the world. In the United States, we had an investigation of their associates. So far, eight more good men and true proved nonhuman."

The President seemed heavily to feel the import of his words.

I said, "That seems to imply an android attempt to take over government. Or so it will seem in the papers."

The President nodded. "That's been rumored for a long time. We're no longer dealing with rumors. I want you to look into the situation. Check with Background and keep me informed. No telling were this will lead."

"Yes, sir. Is tomorrow morning soon enough?"

His smile was glorious, was like saying *I am your friend and you can count on me. I care what happens to you and I will fight for*

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you. The smile had put him into office. When turned on, it still made a man feel privileged.

I stood up.

"Tomorrow morning," I said.

HOW do you act when you've been gone a month and you return to the most gorgeous woman on earth? That was how I acted. I had to watch myself to keep from breaking her ribs.

She said with a half-smile, "Adam, it's obvious that you've been away too long."

"It's also obvious," I said, "that you're suffering as much as I am. Why don't we—"

"A grand idea." She added firmly: "But no samples."

I stepped toward her and put one hand on her magnificent thigh through the white taffeta slit skirt. She moved away, took a deep breath. That marvelously high bosom heaved.

"I don't like to be kill joy," she said, "but I want to wait."

"Maybe—"

"My family would never forgive me a scandal."

"Just—"

"I'm truly sorry," she said. "All I can say is, I'll try to make it up to you later."

Ho-hum.

I was sitting on an activated atomic warhead.

Some say the human male reaches the prime of his sexual vigor at eighteen. The proponents of the belief must be under thrity-three.

I BEGAN to look into the android situation the next day. The head of the Background Bureau, Anthony Smith, was a small worried man who took himself seriously.

"It seems to me," he said, "that there must be many androids where we do not suspect them. I have a feeling that some kind of revolt is going on."

If that were so—why hadn't androids turned up in government in greater number before this latest incident? I asked the question and received the answer.

"Air travel is close to perfect. All individually driven vehicles have sensors and repellers. Few accidents happen unless people want them to happen." Smith smiled wanly. "Back in the twenty-

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one hundreds the casualty companies pressed so hard for safety legislation that accidents were practically eliminated." He added: "The increased cost to the consumer also brought on the great inflation of 2142—but that's neither here nor there. The fact is that androids by law are built with carelessness inhibitors. People kill themselves. Androids don't."

"Hospitals?"

"Why would an android go to a hospital? He—or it—doesn't get sick."

"Hold on," I said. "Congressmen are entitled to free medical service at the Government Hospital. Should be easy to check the records for those who haven't used the service."

He had anticipated me.

"We've already turned up one surgeon and several interns who are opposed to exploratory surgery," Smith said grimly. "I'm afraid the scope of the problem is greater than we like to think."

"May I tell the President?"

"You'd better."

"One thing bothers me," I said. "We have certified—licensed—repair centers for androids known to be androids—but what of an android passing as a human? Even an android goes haywire once in a while."

"We're looking into that. We've already concluded that there must be a very careful and thorough nationwide—or even worldwide—organization capable of repairing synthetic humans outside the licensed channels."

"Wouldn't somebody have spilled such data?"

"Not if they're androids. After all, they're built to do exactly what they're built to do—no more and no less. It would be virtually impossible for an android to tell anybody that he's an android—he was originally built to be human, with a capacity to evolve into an ever more perfect human."

"There are malfunctions, however," I pointed out.

"Every function in an android has in effect a malfunction safety," said Smith. "You may remember that we discovered several hundred years ago that niobium, properly treated, could be conditioned for certain frequencies, voltages and amperages. Any change melts the niobium and blows the fuse. A niobium micro-fuse can't be seen by the naked eye—but it catches the difference in brain waves ranging from conditions of apathy to anger. Androids do not ob-

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trude." He gestured toward a bound copy of *Android Statutes*. "The lawmakers insisted on that safeguard when they legalized androids. They didn't foresee what might happen."

"They never do," I said. "Any precautions I can suggest to the President?"

"Not yet. We're trying to work out a number of simple tests that can be performed without publicity. The problem is, we can devise tests but by the time we can use them we don't need them—by then the answer usually is obvious." He looked at me sharply. "I think we can work out tests, though, by which a husband or wife could be sure of his or her spouse."

I laughed. "I have a test of my own—but it's as you say. By the time I use it, I won't need it."

Smith gave me no answering smile.

"Tell the President we're hard at work. Tell him to prepare himself to be surprised at nothing."

I TRIED to interest myself in the android problem while keeping score on the Chilenos and the Peruvianos and looking in on the Antarctic situation—but how I managed to keep my wits about me, while seeing Susan Quod at least twice a week, is still beyond my ability to understand. However, plans went along for the wedding and finally the night came.

The President himself had requested the privilege of acting as best man. When Susan, the white lace fire-bright against her dusky skin, came down the aisle on the arm of her father the Tanzanian ambassador, I loved her so much that I forgot all the heated hours we had spent in each other's arms. Her liquid eyes found mine and all I could see in them was joy and faith and trust and love. I hoped that was what she would see in mine, for at that moment she was a goddess—not a woman.

I stood beside her and knew what it was to be weak-kneed; I kneeled on the silken cushion and felt for the first time in my life that I was baring my soul without vanity, without egotism, without selfishness. Susan was to be my wife; mine to protect, to honor, to love—you know the feeling. No matter what you have been, no matter what you have done before, this time there is no reservation. This time, what you take will be yours to cherish forever and ever.

We went through the reception and were finally alone in our

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car. We entered the express lane toward my country hideaway, locked in electric drive. Other women had spent time at my place for a few days but that would not happen again. Not after Susan.

I looked at her and tried to smile. She tried to smile back.

I said, "Let's face it. I'm scared to death."

She hugged my arm.

"So am I," she said. "Isn't it strange? Neither of us knows that the other is a man or a woman."

"I'm not sure about you," I said. "But I think you're sure of me."

"Physically, yes." She smiled. "Realistically? I've thought about this night. I've always wondered. Now I'm scared, too."

"We could have become oriented if you had—"

"Oh, no. It wouldn't have been the same, not at all. Now we're married. Committed. We can't back down and we can't walk out and leave it. Now we have to go through with it or else."

"Or else what?" I asked.

She thought about her answer as trees went by at a hundred twenty miles an hour. She looked at me and put her warm hand into mine.

"Or else nothing. We go through with it, I guess."

I began to smile.

"I don't think it will be that bad."

"Nor do I," she said. "But we don't know."

I knew what was worrying her—it worried me, too. In the next few hours I would have to prove that I was a man—with her and to her. I said, "At twenty, you wouldn't have worried."

She laughed and the tension was over. "At twenty, you don't know enough to know there's a doubt."

The fact is, at twenty-eight she had no problem either.

It was a long and lovely night, a gentle night. I soon discovered that her body was golden from her toes to her shell-like ears.

I had, of course, work to do after the honeymoon.

III

STILL more evidence came to light of androids passing as humans. The signs of revolution became rather plain. Some suggested that androids had become self-determining and that a purposeful malfunction had allowed androids to be built, somewhere along the line, without all their automatic inhibiting factors. Perhaps

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electronic emotions could react with one another to form emotions never planned for—anger and pride, for instance. Androids were becoming more like humans every day.

The telepapers and magazines, the television and the tri-di's played it up for all it was worth and perhaps a little more. The *Post* said: "Androids Plot to Take Over Government," and printed an interview with a supposed android. That android, however, was promptly investigated. When it was found that his serial number did not check out, doubt was cast on the authenticity of the story.

Stirrings were sensed in the Senate Subcommittee on Citizenship to require certification of all human-form creatures by surgical exploration. The President pointed out that compulsory surgery was an invasion of privacy; that any such move would evoke tremendous opposition from all minority groups; that the whole world had too few surgeons to carry out such a project; that a certain percentage, even though small, would die from such surgery.

In actual practice only humans would have been explored surgically, since an android who had been passing could have amnesty for the asking if he confessed and were certified. How that would have worked will never be known. Surprises might have occurred in the least likely circles.

For the next two years Susan and I explored my thirty acres and tried to make them ours. The old Spaniards used to scatter a handful of dust and grass, then urinate on the land and claim it in the name of His Catholic Majesty. We had a far more effective way of establishing our rights. In fact, from the great boulder where we could see half the valley, we considered claiming the State of Maryland—but decided against it.

The sun brought out the fires in her golden skin as she lay on her stomach, trim brown buttocks toward the sky. She watched the mile-away traffic, then rolled over to lie on her back.

"It's almost too much," she said, watching my eyes.

"Too much, I guess, for anybody but us," I said, reaching for her.

"Shall we come here tomorrow?"

"I'm on duty tomorrow. Important goings-on over the gold supply."

"Gold?"

I was not alerted. She had never shown interest in economics.

"Some foolish people," I explained, "have tried to manipulate the gold supply. The President wants me to investigate."

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"Why is the President interested?"

"Gold," I said idly, "involves the economic well-being of this country and the world."

She looked troubled—if you can imagine a gorgeous, golden, naked woman looking troubled.

I explained further, as though to a child, "You see, we learned hundreds of years ago, after many vain attempts to do without it, that gold is more than a medium of exchange. For some reason the measure of payment for impersonal effort, in every human mind, is expressed unchangeably in terms of gold. Genetics by now have something to do with it—at any rate, once we accepted the fact we kept the supply balanced and we've had a serene economy."

"But now?"

"Now somebody's tampering with the regular flow of gold—we don't know exactly how, but undoubtedly the motive is personal profit. Stupid and selfish, isn't it?"

She sat up.

"Stupid and selfish?"

"Sure. Our villain is threatening the world's stability."

THOUGH we were two grown persons utterly naked in the woods, there was a coolness between us as we returned to shelter. On my part, I could not understand her spontaneous interest in the subject of gold—but I found out a week later when I traced the source of potential economic disaster.

Junius Quod, Susan's grandfather, was immobilizing a large part of the Earth's economy. He was currently chief guardian of the family's ancestral fortune, which consisted of a huge hoard of the basic metal of commerce—some said as much as a thousand tons. He had borrowed against his holdings to buy more. Already the price of gold was up from the legal seventy credits an ounce to well over eighty-five. Since Junius had bought something like six hundred tons, he had now made a three-hundred-million profit—unless he ruined the economy in the process. The effects were already being felt in various parts of the globe. International unrest was growing.

The President told me a few days later, "Junius Quod is accumulating credits for more than profit. He has tremendous power. If that should somehow fall into the wrong hands—"

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"It's possible," I pointed out, "that he wants the power for himself."

The President nodded.

"Anything is possible."

I filled Susan in that evening but I couldn't have been convincing. She was cold to me that night. I was annoyed by her reaction to what was basically none of her business, grandfather or no grandfather. We slept that night in separate beds, not even facing each other. I found the situation painful but thought it was time to show her who was head of the family.

After a few days of arm's-length existence, during which I needed all my willpower to keep my hands off her, she said she was going to visit her parents for a few weeks. I was startled but relieved.

The world situation was now so bad that I had already considered staying at the Press Club for a while to be near the action. I had hesitated to move out on Susan. Once she left, I transferred to the Press Club and settled down to a round of reports from all over the globe.

The gold crisis grew stickier. Old Junius insisted on his terms before he would turn loose an ounce of gold—and his terms changed daily. Ostensibly he sought profit—but he had to have a deeper motive. It developed that he had bought another eight hundred tons and world trade was really hurting. The old man must have had money in every bank on earth.

The android situation was also out of hand. Smith suspected that some androids had either murdered human beings or had stepped in at normal deaths and assumed the decedents' identities without the knowledge even of the next of kin. The fraud was virtually impossible to prove, since records all checked out—and relatives tended to show blind faith. Once again, the only sure answer was surgical inspection and that was unlikely to be used.

Toward the end of two weeks I was starving for Susan. I had called her, of course—but she had been perfunctory in her speech and her eyes had evaded mine.

So I continued to stay at the Press Club.

Finally she agreed to meet me in Washington.

SHE was as eager for me as I for her. Our reunion was like falling into heaven again. The next morning Susan's bed was a warm nest.

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She smelled as sweet as blossoms in May. We rose at noon, ordered breakfast in our suite.

The subject that had separated us came up unexpectedly.

"What about my grandfather?" she asked.

I looked at her. Black hair gleaming in the sun. Great black liquid eyes. Golden skin with dusky depths in the secret places.

"Your grandfather," I said, "has as near as I can figure, three thousand tons of gold. He's upsetting not only the world economy but international politics."

She took a bite of mango.

"What happens now?"

"Hard to say." I luxuriated in looking at her. "The United States has already offered him an illegal price on his holdings to save the world situation—but he's holding out for more."

"Why not pay him what he asks and end the matter, if it's so important?"

I lifted my eyebrows.

"Submit to highway robbery? Besides, his price keeps rising—"

She gave me a very delicate, very beautiful frown.

"You used the word *robbery*?"

I shrugged.

"It's what his position amounts to."

"My grandfather is not a robber."

The coolness in her voice and the glint in her eyes were a warning.

"I didn't mean that he is in a literal sense."

"I still don't see why they don't nail down his price, pay it and settle the whole thing. I know him—and he's neither stupid nor unreasonable."

I was annoyed.

"Because the additional money would have to come from the world's several governments. The governing bodies of the leading nations would never agree.

She seemed actually puzzled.

"I don't see why not."

"You might as well face it—the right term is highway robbery. Governments that submitted to it openly would fall. Your grandfather has the world by the tail—to what purpose, I don't know."

"I know my grandfather. I think he's bored with inaction and wants some excitement."

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"A hell of a way to find it."

"Grandfather was never one to sit around." She studied me. "What part of this game is yours?"

"I must recommend a course of action to the President."

The room became so still that I could hear small currents of air as they stirred in the purifier.

"What will you recommend?"

"I suppose the enlightened thing would be for the world to go off the gold standard. Eventually either your grandfather or your father would have to sell—but not before untold suffering had been caused. We tried once before to eliminate gold." I eyed her steadily. "In any event, your grandfather is in for a lot of abuse."

"I don't think you should blame my grandfather," she said.

"Look, Susan, you can't help it if he's a predator."

Her eyes blazed.

"The family fortune was made hundreds of years ago—in ivory."

I had had enough.

"Your ancestors made those billions from the blood of black men," I said.

She paled visibly. I was sorry for what I had said but would not admit it. I had my job to do and she had interfered. I fastened my tunic and walked out.

I CALLED the following week but she would not speak to me. Old Junius would not sell his gold—he, too, would not speak to me. The nations' representatives convened and went off the gold standard in the course of a weekend.

Tension was high all over the world. For a week I was on my feet twenty hours a day, without a moment free for calling Susan. Finally I couldn't stand it. I awoke one morning, shaved, poured down hot coffee and went to the visiphone.

Susan answered. She was beautiful that morning.

"Hello, Susan."

"You were quoted in the *Post* as saying my grandfather is a tyrant."

"Don't let's quarrel, Susan. I've had a job to do and I've done the best I could. That need not concern the way we feel about each other."

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"It does." After a moment's pause she said softly, "I love you, Adam."

She hung up.

I called back but she did not answer. I was miserable but I had to meet the press. I made my comments as gentle as I could but I had to point out that Junius Quod had cornered the world's gold for no reason except speculation and that the world had defended itself as best it could.

I listened to a barrage of questions. One reporter asked, "Do you think Junius Quod was justified in any way?"

"I do not," I said.

"Did you say he was a highway robber?"

The phrase had been used frequently. I smiled. "Not exactly a gentleman's gentleman," I said.

By the time I was back in my office in the White House, the *Post* had a headline on the telepaper: "Presidential Assistant Says Quod is Highway Robber."

I winced and hoped Susan would miss the report. I tried to reach her but no one answered. I concentrated with an effort on sorting the documents of the previous few days. But keeping my mind on my work with Susan in my veins was not easy.

Forty minutes later a call came through from Anthony Smith.

"Can you meet me at the morgue?" he asked.

In my job, a trip to the morgue was not unusual.

"Yes," I said.

I was there within a half-hour.

A worried-looking Smith met me in the office. "I have bad news for you," he said, putting an arm across my shoulders.

I stared at him.

"I have no living relatives."

"You had a wife," he said soberly.

A great band constricted around my heart. Suddenly my mouth was dry.

"Susan?"

He nodded, watching me.

It hit me like a falling mountain. I reeled for a moment and finally said, "Not Susan. There was nothing wrong. She wasn't sick."

"I'm sorry," Smith said quietly.

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HISTOPORT 3939

Mark Power

QUITE simply, Antigrav came to Complex Quintar as a gray-green spore-shell drifting through space. To explain the complexity behind this simplicity, it is necessary to review a bit.

Antigravity was discovered in the EarthStellar Year 4210, the Thirium Galactic Mean Year 109, QunitarSolar Year 736554, Tri-Puniam MoonMonth Year of the Waning Quarter 6587—all co-existing as a moment of different times.

Its discoverer was a ThirdGalactic scientist named Tram Giilad, born on planet 35Y, of Earthborn parents, descendants of the Original Colonizers. Giilad was a crew member of InterThird ship *Barius*, which during TGMY 109 was engaged in collecting geologic samples from planetoids claimed but not yet colonized by the ThirdGalactic Mentors. On the 9th solstice, 36th hour the *Barius* settled into a lock orbit about the planetoid Tri-Puniam, so named because its Mentor discoverer was a Splorer First Class named Puniam and its two moons were nearly as large as the parent mass.

Giilad and two assistants came to rest on the surface of Tri-Puniam during its long green twilight; they settled their resistor locks, established sonobeams to the *Barius* and, before collecting their samples, surveyed the planetoid via coldbeam.

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The beam revealed flat plains, crater pocks, masses of scrub vegetation with pale, spongelike leaves, a constantly present, yet constantly shifting spectrum atmosphere of methahydrone vapor, gas and water marshes choked with spore vegetation, an intelligent life form, R9-6 on the Moiser Scale (spore-form, non-technological, psychokinetically advanced, non-hostile) and great masses of a green, striated quartz-like rock. Giilad and party filled two rhem bags with this last material and collected samples from sectors 7, 15, and 36 before returning to the *Barius* and, in six revolutions, to 35Y.

The rest is histodata known to every learnchild; the green rock turned to gas when heated three degrees above its normal temperature of -345°F, and the gas was indisputably anti-gravitic.

Giilad became a famous man, a Mentor First, and that squalid episode in the history of the Third Galaxy known as antigrav fever began, a period which lasted for all of three Tri-Puniam months.

The pattern was familiar: despite Mentor control a series of pirate camps were established on Tri-Puniam; a devastating Mentor supression followed; the MentorMiners who succeeded the pirates became worse than their predecessors; living conditions were prespace primitive; Tri-Puniam quickly lost whatever value it had as a colony; the native life-forms (Risors, so named after the anthrosplorer who first studied them) were cruelly exploited, especially the subclan living in the antigrav area.

Into this scene of degradation and greed settled the RougeMiner Asel Mandor 2323, an Advent from the Pulsoar Complex Quintar. Descendant of an OC, he was in appearance a humanoid, although culturally spaceons away from members of the Third. Consequently, with the aid of a forged voiceprint, he arrived on Tri-Puniam with a contingent of bonafide RougeMiners from EarthStellar. His mission: to become personally rich beyond the wildest dreams of Midas (EarthStellar myth 25) by delivering to Complex Quintar a milligram of antigrav.

Green twilight, corona blue at its edges. Asel Mandor, applying for antigrav permit 3, yes, Humanoid, 3rd GL PL25 origin, Occupation: RogueMiner.

—Do you realize that antigrav mining will probably kill you?

—They told me that on EarthStellar.

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—If it does, Mentor Control is in no way responsible; voiceprint that if you agree.

—Agreed.

—List your equipment; holograms required.

—1 Lasershaft 26, coldtemp suit -

—You need two.

—Sorry, two, here's the reqHolo, you see it lists two.

—Go on.

—40 gas collators, 1 dwelling cubicle permit Gravtown, 1 conditional access mating module, permit for manuRations 900 caloric, 1 ReturnCollect to EarthStellar, permit to mine 90cc antigrav, credit for EarthStellar Third ManUnits 20000.

—Recite the penalty for overmining of antigrav; for overpossession of EarthStellar ManUnits.

—Extinction.

—Good, voiceprint. Method of extinction?

—Dispersal.

—Good, voiceprint. Recite the penalty for concealment of antigrav.

—Dispersal.

—Voiceprint. The penalty for unauthorized intergalactic travel beyond the Third before a mandatPeriod of six IGM years have elapsed?

—Dispersion to the fourth.

—Which means?

—The fourth generation and all those before of Asel Mandor will be dispersed.

—Voiceprint.

DULL clang and *whump* of antigrav processors; the constant, milky shine of gravrock crystals; Asel Mandor on his back in an excavation two inches larger than his body, six earthmiles into the interior of sector 42, sores from his coldtemp suit with their irritating pain, lasershaft probing, amethyst beam frozen in the methahydrone air, four hundred degrees below Humanoid lifeTol, filtered and refiltered hydrohel tasting of plastics and gravrock dust. I know I'm going to vomit this time, Mandor thought, the coldtemp suit was, as usual, too hot. Sticky armpits and crotch, streams of sweat over his body naked inside the suit, clang-*whump*, gravrock crumbling, rolling, heaping, enough, enough.

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—Where does this godawful food come from?

—ManuRations, of course. I haven't seen you before. Been mining long?

—Long enough. Six EY months over in sector 20. At least the food was better there.

—Six more dead in shaft 17.

—Good, that's more rock for us.

—You're a happy one, aren't you. Supposing you had been there?

—Then it would be more rock for you.

—Well, you knew it wouldn't be a picnic, didn't you? Who forced you to come here anyway? Aren't we all volunteers?

—Volunteers. I suppose you realize we volunteered to line Mentor pockets. What the hell do we get out of it?

Mandor stood naked in the rehabCavern and sprayed the inside of his suit. The other miner's body was covered with healing and festering tempsores. He slowly lowered himself into a salve pit.

—More money than the average Third sees in six IGPY's.

—Oh, and you're really going to enjoy it, aren't you. Assuming you survive the shafts, that is. And if you do, you'll be lucky if your doctor lets you keep ten ManUnits of it. Do you think those sores are going to vanish overnight? And what about your lungs? Do you know what hydrohel does to a man's lungs?

—They have a MinerRehab center on 23R. TenThou ManUnits and you're good as new.

—TenThou ManUnits! That's more money than my ProtoFather made in a lifetime. And these goddamn Mentors make more than that from one milligram of antigrav!

—Friend, you don't seem to realize that that's life. Always has been and always will be.

Speechless and sullen, Asel Mandor lashed himself with sanisteam, stepped inside his coldtemp suit, lashed it shut, hooked up hydrohel, elimino tubes and commoBox, shouldered collator and shaft and, like a strange lumbering parody of a man, headed towards the mineshaft echoing with a dull clang-*whump*, clang-*whump*.

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That's *your* life, my friend. Clash-probe, clash-probe. A shower of crystals fell on his faceplate covered with a faery rime of frost, but that's no life for a Pulsoar, no sir.

IF A miner was spared by the mine, more than likely he would meet his end in the Nark camps of the Mentor pits where Asel Mandor lay on his rack, listening to two men fighting over a gambling debt. Soon one or both would be dead—the prophecy was fulfilled even before he finished thinking it. One man was pierced by a lasershaft—the other was ground up by a Mentor deathwagon. Most of the miners were either in the filmpits, sleeping the long sleep of the narcosatiated, or laboring with their mating modules, raising the monotonous whine of machine love. Some were unreeling tapes to their loved ones, others simulfighting, others gambling, many waiting with eyes open in the Puniam twilight for their next shift to begin.

Asel Mandor lay in the uneasy green dark and thought.

Problem: Antigrav as a gas is instantly Mentor detectable.

Solution: Smuggle out antigrav rock.

Problem: Antigrav rock changes to a gas at normtemp. Also, it takes seven earthtons of rock to make one milligram of gas.

Solution: Change antigrav into a form other than gas or rock.

Problem: How?

Solution: Consult an antigrav specialist.

Problem: They are all Mentors.

Solution: With the exception of the Risors.

Problem: I don't know their language. They hate humanoids. It is doubtful if they know anything about antigrav.

Solution: Use a transtape. The Risors do not hate humanoids. They are simply indifferent to them. You are only speculating about their antigrav knowledge; find out for sure.

Problem: I am a Pulsoar Advent—unheard of one of us to mate with an extraspecies. It would probably kill me. Disgust, shame.

Solution: One cc of antigrav equals thirty million QuintUnits.

A certain class of miners would experience anything as long as it gave relief from mining. This group, ostracized, covered with festering sores, wild-haired, had collected a number of Risors with whom they mated, scorning the modules so conveniently provided. Some had even taken to living with Risors, living illustrations of

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the rule that the painful can become as addictive as the pleasurable.

On the eve of his second Tri-Puniam twilight in the mines, Asel Mandor acquired a Risor mate. "She"—the Risors are asexual spore-forms—was named Ponga—or so the syllables sounded when spoken through Risor voicegills—and Mandor quickly discovered that to mate with a Risor was a truly maso-sadistic experience, for Risor and humanoid alike. The Risor was forced to achieve an extremely hot body temperature of 42°F—ten minutes of which was usually fatal—and the humanoid, in order to achieve his end, had to penetrate a veined bag of cold slime. In fact, if the truth be known, Mandor was physiologically unable to mate with Ponga after their first meeting, a fact which left Ponga indifferent, Mandor's fellow MaterMiners amused and Mandor himself, relieved. Nevertheless, driven by a motive far stronger than personal considerations, he applied for and was granted an extraspecies dwelling permit and in due course was living with an intelligent emerald spore as a roommate.

—Ponga? They were talking with aid of a contraband transtape.

—Yes, MandorMiner.

—It's not that I don't want to mate with you, it's just that I can't. You see, Humanoids have no conscious control over their—

—Then why does it bother you, Mandor Miner?

—I thought it might bother you, Ponga.

—No, I am not a HeatSeeker. (A Risor that masochistically enjoys heat; it goes without saying that most of the RisorMaters were HeatSeekers.)

—You're not a HeatSeeker. Then why—

—I am a Learner.

—A Learner?

—RisorSprong wishes to know the motives and habits of the RockCollectors.

—And who is RisorSprong, may I ask?

—In your language, ProtoRisor.

—Well, never mind that. I want you to do me a favor, Ponga, I want you to tell the MaterMiners that we have mated.

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—Why?

—It is important that they think so.

—Why?

—You ask a lot of questions, RisorPonga.

—So do you, RogueMiner.

—Why do you call me that? I am a MaterMiner.

—You are not. You are not even a RogueMiner. You are a Pulsoar Advent.

Face very pale, Mandor waited for the beat of his heart to subside. His lasershaft lay across the cubicle, out of reach.

—I can tell from your genetic spore-trace that you are not of the Third. Only natives of Pulsoar Complex Quintar have your spore-trace.

—Just a minute. Who besides you knows I am a Pulsoar? Not that I am admitting it—

—No one. Should anyone know?

Mandor swore under his breath. No one! Not even ProtoRisor or whatever his name was. He said so.

—Well, he knows of course. And all the other Risors.

—Well, damn it, no Rogue Miners. No Mater Miners. Particularly no Mentors. And if any of those other bagheads so much as whisper one word of this—

—If it is what you wish, it will be done.

Breathing easier, Mandor turned to stare into Ponga's eyesensors.

—You must be careful, little Ponga, I very nearly killed you then.

—I know, said Ponga matter-of-factly. A port parted; a tray of ManuRations entered their cubicle.

—Damnit, Ponga, don't do that, it makes me nervous. Bring the food in by hand.

—You are a nervous species, Asel Mandor.

Mandor, without replying, sat up and tore into the ManuRations.

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—What do Risors eat? If it is anything resembling this garbage—

—We eat the atmosphere. And the triganium rock.

It took a long moment for the import of Ponga's last statement to sink into Mandor's head as he sat busily chewing the edible plastics.

—Rock? You eat—you eat the rock?

—Of course. It is RisorSprong manna. We eat it when the two moons are in conjunction. Very holy twilight.

—Then why do the Risors let Mentor take the rock? I would think—

—Very simple, Mandor Advent. They are stronger than we are. Which is why I am a Learner.

For the first time, Ponga seemed to show emotion; her body was filled out like a veined balloon and a strange gas hovered about her gills.

In his excitement, Mandor forgot all about eating, an almost unheard of occurrence for a Pulsoar Advent.

—The rock. After you eat it, what happens to it? Do you excrete it? Does it turn into a gas, a liquid? Does it become part of you? What happens to it?

—It forms the material of our outer skin. During the Holy Moon Twilight, we shed our skin of the twilight before and eat a new one.

—These skins—what happens to them?

—Very holy. Kept in SprongChamber. Form the birthskin of new Risors.

—What would happen if I ate rock?

—Nothing—you are not spore.

Plans formed, dissolved and formed again in Mandor's agitated mind.

—Ponga! Listen, I want you to marry me. In return I'll teach you everything you want to know about the Third. And Quintar too. All I ask in return is one of your old skins.

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—Yes.

—Yes?

—I am Learner. Nothing is important to Learner but learning. Not even RisorSprong Birthskin.

—Oh, I don't believe it! I won't be able to sleep this shift!

First thing tomorrow, apply for an Extraspecies marital plate, get the goddamn hell out of here.

Ponga hovered in the middle of the cubicle, shedding emerald light. For quite some time, as she floated effortlessly through and between the walls of the cubicle she heard Asel Mandor babbling to himself.

—Unheard of. There can be no possible reason for you to want to marry a RisorMater.

—I am in love with her.

The SimulMentor turned his beryl faceplate away in disgust.

—But your mining—I've never heard of a RogueMiner leaving before his allotment—

—I am in love with RisorPonga. She is afraid the mining will kill me. She wants to return with me to EarthStellar.

—But there is no locksuit designed for a Risor.

—Well, goddamn it, she won't wear one, then.

—Against ThirdRule.

—You know perfectly well, Respected Mentor, that locksuits are only used in cases of emergency. If one develops, I'll throw her into a Humanoid suit. Or an Antribes suit; they are very similar to Risors.

—Different breathing apparatus, which leads us to another problem MandorMiner. To live with this Risor you will have to spend the rest of your life in a coldtemp suit.

—She can exist at 38°F.

—But can she breath oxyhydro?

—No, but by God, I can wear a venthelmet.

SimulMentor oscillators responded to the profanity.

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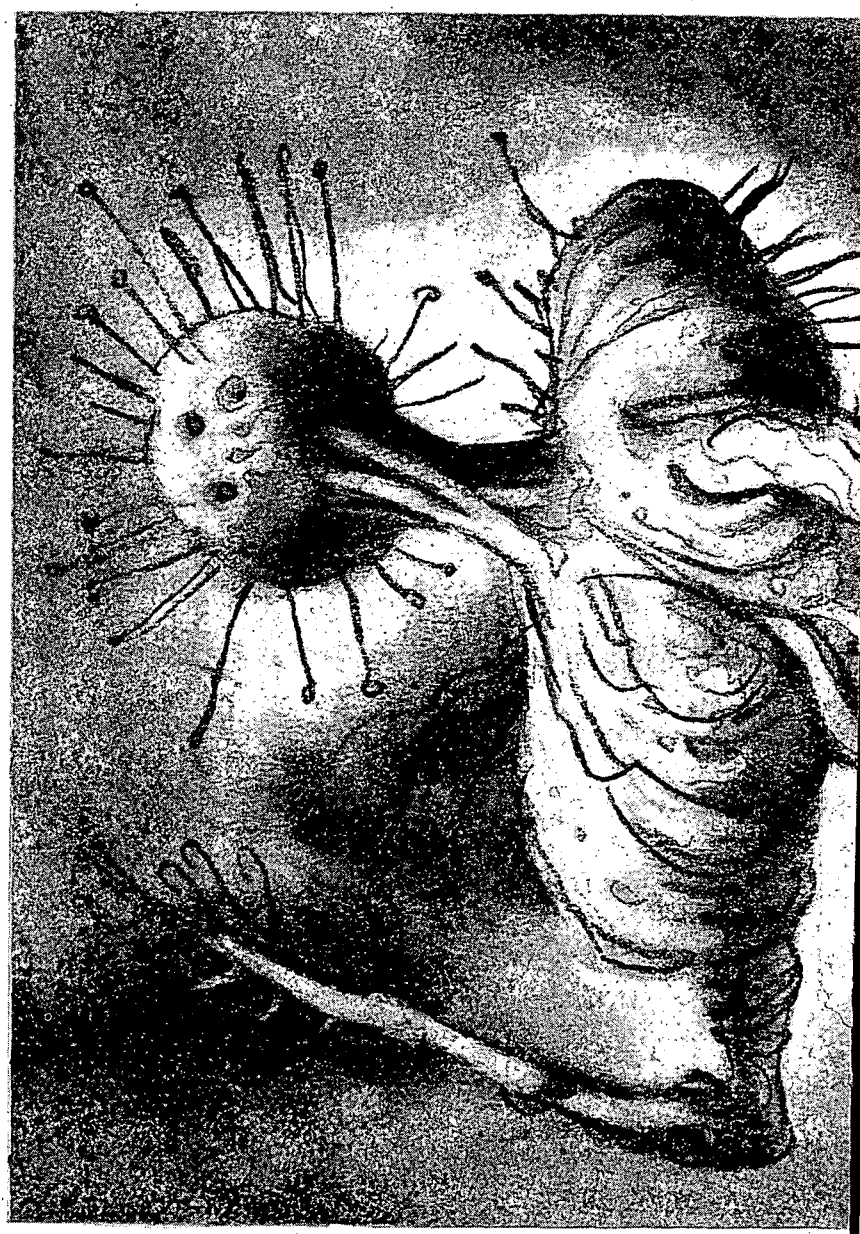

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—You mean that in order to torture yourself sexually with this creature—I know, you love her—you will spend the rest of your life in a venthelmet?

—Yes, I would and will.

The SimulMentor, sighing, signed the ES marital plate. Voiceprint. The capacities of MaterMiners seem to expand every day. Next they'll be asking me if they can become Risors. Well, I won't wish you luck, MandorMiner. I would say you'll need endurance more. And a strong stomach. Goodbye, MandorMiner.

THE next EY week passed rapidly. A thoroughly disgusted SimulMentor performed the brief Third marital ceremony. Mandor was given credit for tenThou ManUnits for the antigrav he had mined. Passage aboard a two-man lockship—two-man because no Humanoid could be persuaded to share the same quarters with a MaterMiner and his Risor mate—was secured and Ponga, in what little time she had remaining on her native planet, gorged herself on rock so that her skin became as thick and horny as a toad's.

The moment arrived. MaterMiner and spouse entered the lockship, programed Tetradrive for EarthStellar, passed through the gasdetects — an anxious moment here — and entered the outer perimeters of warpspace almost at once.

"Well, Ponga," said Mandor Advent, "how about a little food?"

For the first time in an eon he felt like a new man, a man soon to be the richest individual in Quintar—or the Third, too, for that matter.

Ponga was looking at the receding teleduplex of her planet's moons; they were like two child's marbles in space.

"Food, Ponga. You won't have time to miss that hellhole."

At that moment, the commruby lit up: *Lockship 1687 programed for EarthStellar, confirm presence of antigrav aboard. Show permit at once.* "Antigrav!" shrieked Mandor. "There's no antigrav aboard this ship! Just me and my wife!"

In the next millisecond, a MentorBeam disintegrated lockship 1687. Incandescent sparks fell through space, dying embers.

Asel Mandor Advent joined the race of the poorest of men—those asleep forever.

And RisorPonga streamed starward, wearing a shroud of antigrav.

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K.H. Hartley

THE MALLINSON CASE

QUEENS BENCH DIVISION (Lord Mulliner, C.J., Bridgley and Hassels, JJ.), February 2, 2072

Sir Guy Borthwick Q.C.: May it please your Lordship, I appear to defend Commander Mallinson S.S., who stands charged with the murder of Jeremy Acton. I trust your Lordship will bear with me while I traverse certain matters antecedent to those now concerning us, an understanding of which, however, is needful before I can enter upon the main part of my argument.

First, the doctrine of judicial ignorance requires me to explain

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what I am sure your Lordship knows very well as a private person but must pretend not to know while on the Bench: I mean the facts about solidograph communication. Briefly, it is an electronic device which, like and yet unlike last century's radio and television, sends out a signal designed to produce a response but not in all receiving sets, only in one. In the earlier systems mentioned the response in the receiver was initially sound alone, then both sound and sight. With solido, the signal elicits from the matter-banks beneath the circular metal base a "persona" which is indistinguishable in every respect from the human originator of the call and which, through feedback, conveys to him or to her, as the case may be, all the sensations experienced by the image. For the time of the transmission then, the sender has thrown his whole consciousness abroad—there is no feeling of duplication; one is wholly and solely aware of standing on a warm metal plate in some other room a hemisphere away, in one's breathing natural body as before.

Second, this leads me to the suit for divorce brought by Commander Mallinson against his wife Drusilla in May, 2070, transcripts of the evidence of which have been circulated by me to my learned friends opposite and to all officers of the court. Reference to this document will disclose that adultery was alleged against Mrs. Mallinson, the co-respondent being Mr. Jeremy Acton. A reputable firm of private detectives had monitored a call from the respondent to her alleged lover. They had recorded the scene visible on the solido plate in Mr. Acton's bedroom by means of tridi tapes, which were played back to the court, greatly alleviating, if I may say so in passing, the tedium of our profession. These persons having sworn that the tapes were faithfully recorded at the relevant time and place, they were admitted in evidence—and the point was established that Mr. Jeremy Acton had in fact copulated with the "persona" of Mrs. Mallinson. Neither did he deny it.

Whether or not this constituted adultery was the issue—and one which excited more than common interest since, although solido transmission had been operating for five years and above and doubtless had already been turned to immoral purposes, this was the first action in divorce to ensue from its use—or abuse. The defense put forward a series of analogies to establish the harmlessness of caressing an image of a real person when that person was not present. Consider, so they said, a silly girl who, in the nineteenth century,

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kisses the photograph of a male actor. Is her conduct, though laughable, not entirely innocent? In the twentieth century young females had been known to cover the television screen with lipstick —but did the guitar players in the studio need to wipe their faces? Some men, like Pygmalion, had loved a statue—was what they fondled not lifeless marble? Others again, in times approaching the present, had sought pleasures which strict morality must condemn —but which the law has so far found blameless—in certain simulacra of the female form deriving from the original Japanese erotic devices in rubber designed to be filled with warm water. Continuously perfected, these simulacra have developed pseudo-muscles, motility, a lifelike skin texture, all the appropriate reflexes and responses, till today the robot mistress is distinguishable from the real article only, so cynics would say, by its consistent amiability. It is common practice for them to resemble dancers and actresses who are paid royalties for the use of their likenesses but who are never sued for adultery on this basis.

The "persona" is such another animated mobile—directed from a distance—not the body itself. And only the body can commit adultery. Further, illegitimate offspring cannot result, hence no tort exists.

The prosecution contended that the feedback does constitute presence of the real body, the "persona" being connected with the central nervous system of the sender so straitly that he, as a sentient being, has been wholly transported to the receiving plate, no faintest residual consciousness being left behind. Such total transference, they insisted, had never been achieved before, so that the analogies drawn with photographs, films and robots were false analogies and nothing to the purpose.

However, the learned Judge ruled that Mr. Acton's conduct, though morally reprehensible, did not constitute adultery and dismissed the suit, with costs against the plaintiff.

Let us now briefly consider this plaintiff, rebuffed, dishonored and still married to a woman he despised. If a lawyer has lost his probity, he is no lawyer—if a soldier has lost his honor, he is no soldier. Commander Mallinson brooded over what he felt was final ruin until suddenly, one night, without premeditation, he called Mr. Acton by solidograph. I must premise that his face was unknown to Mr. Acton, since he had brought the divorce suit *in absentia*, as is the privilege of the Survey Service, frequently ab-

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sent from Earth, maybe even light-years away. Moreover, since he was in the intelligence division of the service, no photographs or tri-di images of him existed anywhere. So, when he appeared on the plate in the deceased's London apartment, all the latter could see was a civil stranger in ordinary black lounging pajamas, holding in his hand a sheet of paper which he said was the Trelawney Letter and offering to sell it for three thousand stellars.

Lord Mulliner, C.J.: Counsel is reminded that the document in question comes under the Defense of the Realm Act, as amended in 1994, and must not be discussed, though it may be named.

Sir Guy Borthwick Q.C.: Your Lordship may rest assured that I shall not go further than naming it. Well, Mr. Acton, for reasons I refrain from mentioning, was prepared to pay the price asked and more, if what was offered was the genuine thing. After some haggling it was agreed between them that Mr. Acton was to step on to the plate and be allowed to read the letter still held in the stranger's hand, and if he were satisfied, the bargain would be struck. It is further evidence of lack of premeditation that the piece of paper bore no resemblance to the Trelawney Letter, being no more than a sheet of routine orders snatched up at random from Commander Mallinson's desk at his base on Ischia. We know from the defendant's own statement what ensued. No sooner had Mr. Acton set foot on the plate than he was seized in a judo stranglehold and died within the next two minutes, while Commander Mallinson murmured in his ear, "It must be a great consolation to you to reflect that my action, while morally reprehensible, does not constitute murder."

Immediately on breaking contact with London, Commander Mallinson reported all the facts to his superior officer and was placed under arrest. It is not my purpose, as it was not my client's, to deny the truth: he was indeed responsible for the death laid to his charge. Our plea, my Lord, is for acquittal, if the precedent of the divorce action be accepted and the consequence drawn that only the body can commit homicide as only the body can commit adultery; alternatively we propose an *alibi*, the real person of the accused having remained out of England at the time stipulated. Or, at worst, we hope for a verdict of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation, total absence of premeditation and voluntary confes-

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sion of a crime, if it be one, which otherwise would forever have remained unsolved, since Survey calls cannot be monitored, as is well known."

Mr. K.F.W. Stoate Q.C.: May it please your Lordship, in my duties as public prosecutor I have often been spellbound by my learned friend's eloquence, but have seldom been so completely deterred as now from any attempt to imitate it. To the contrary, I shall be brief and simple: we say that one man has killed another in a novel fashion but that the novelty of the fashion is irrelevant. All that is left, when eloquence and novelty have been taken away, is murder. We therefore ask for Adjustment."

The Court adjourned for one hour and six minutes

Lord Mulliner, C.J.: My brothers have invited me to read the

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verdict we have reached. We are of one mind that the accused, Walter de la Poer Mallinson, has been most ably defended and that every circumstance that might have been favorable to him has been put before us. We regret the use of the word "eloquence" by the public prosecutor, feeling that Sir Guy's address was as succinct as it was forceful.

However, the basis of the law in Western Europe is common sense and our share of it tells us that where there is intent to kill another, and this in fact is done, it cannot matter how strange the instrument by which the crime is committed. The bullet is not the man, but if he sends it out to kill, the man must bear the penalty: the "persona" may or may not be the man, but if he sends it out on an errand like to the bullet's errand—then he must bear the penalty.

The accused will rise. Walter de la Poer Mallinson, it is my duty to sentence you to be taken hence to the place from which you came, and then transferred within seven days to the Adjustment Center at Dorking, where you will undergo the treatment prescribed by law. Remove the prisoner.

Now that this unhappy man is no longer here to have his feelings hurt by what I shall say, I am free to record that the present bench echoes the protests so frequently made by other parts of the judiciary against the penalty of Adjustment. The legislature has decided to substitute for capital punishment and indeed for prolonged imprisonment what psychologists call, in their quaint jargon, "restructuring of the personality." What this means, in plain words, is that the condemned man will be taken to Dorking and somebody else will be brought back. Never again will that same individual go about in the world—he has forever been subtracted from the human sum. Not only for time but for eternity, unless God in His mercy decides to create a new Walter de la Poer Mallinson when at last his empty shell shall die. In Adjustment no pain is inflicted, no blood is shed, but it is infinitely more cruel than hanging, for that entailed only bodily death, after which both Christians and rationalists might hope for survival of personality. Adjustment finally destroys the individual, both here and hereafter as far as we can tell, always saving that divine grace we trust will not be refused to the man we have just sentenced. The court stands adjourned. ∞

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Rachel Cosgrove Payes

PRIVATE PHONE

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"BUT, Mother all of the girls have them."

"Now, Jennifer, I've told you. Your father and I don't approve of private phones for girls your age."

"But I'm nearly sixteen. Sue got one for her sixteenth birthday. And so did Loralee. I don't see why I can't have one, too."

"Jennifer, they cost—"

"Oh, Mother, credits, credits, credits, that's all you talk about." Jennifer's rather pretty face took on a petulant look. She whined, which grated on Mrs. Wilson's already frayed nerves. "Daddy makes as many credits as Mr. Bunty—and Maria's had a private phone for over a year now."

"Which is one of the best reasons I know of for saying no, Jennifer. I've been talking with Mrs. Bunty. She says that if they had it to do over again, they'd not agree to Maria's having her own phone. Do you know that she's actually had a ten per cent hearing loss since they had the phone installed? To say nothing of headaches due to eyestrain."

"Oh, Mother, that's a lot of nonsense. I dialed the latest test results on private phones just today. The Society of Eye and Ear Specialists says that you get just as much eyestrain using the home visiphone as you do with a private one."

Her mother gave a triumphant little smile. It wasn't often these days that she managed to score ahead of her teenage daughter. "For your information, young lady, I dialed the Public Information Center myself. And heard that very article." She noticed with satisfaction that Jennifer's face fell a mile. "They also said that the reason for teenage eye and ear difficulties from private phones was excessive use."

"But Mother—I promise I'd use it only—"

"No. Now, Jennifer, I don't want to hear about this again."

The subject wasn't settled, though. When her husband came home from work, after a hard two hours at his job, Mrs. Wilson knew immediately that something was wrong.

"What is it, dear?"

"Later." He glanced at their daughter, who did not miss the exchange. She missed little these days.

"Daddy," Jennifer wheedled, "if you'll just let me have a private phone for my sixteenth birthday, I promise I won't ask for anything else."

"Well, I should hope not. You know what they cost."

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His wife frowned at him but for once he did not heed her warning looks. After lunch Jennifer went into her own cubicle to watch Tri-D and her mother attacked.

"Dear, I've already explained to Jennifer that we think she's too young for a private phone. Now you sit there when she brings up the subject and let it go without squelching her."

Instead of countering with his own reasons, her husband changed the subject, or so she thought for a minute.

"Dr. Rizzuto called me today. At work." He sounded properly aggrieved. Calls at work were frowned on.

She was alarmed. Rizzuto was the Central School psychiatrist. "What's wrong? Hasn't Jennifer been doing her assignments properly? She goes into her cubicle and slides the door—so I've just assumed—I mean, I don't like to interrupt her while she's tuned in to the school computer."

Her husband laid it on the line. "She's been goofing off the last few weeks. One day she even disconnected before the class hour was up."

"But she's always been so conscientious about her school work."

"Rizzuto ran through a subliminal analysis on her the next time she did tune in for class. Do you know what he says?"

She was too distressed to be able to think straight.

"It's lack-of-conformity syndrome."

"Lack of—how serious is it?"

"The doctor says, in teenagers it can cause permanent damage to the psyche—or was it the id—or the ego? I have trouble with this technical lingo. Anyway, he says she feels we're too old-fashioned, and this makes her different from her peer group."

"Old-fashioned?" she looked about their tiny apartment indignantly. "That's not so. We have the latest model Tri-D. We're months behind in our credit balance—what more can she ask? Now, if we settled our bills on time the way my parents did—if we had kept that old Tri-D without the odor-producing attachment—then I might have found her feelings justified. But to call us old-fashioned—really!"

"It's this business of the private phone. Rizzuto says she has intense feelings of deprivation because we will not allow her to have one."

"Honestly, sometimes I think the Central School is in league with the kids against their parents."

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"Now, dear, you mustn't feel that way. It's—" he gave a forced little laugh to soften the words—"it's old-fashioned. Remember, we're living in the twenty-first century."

"All right. She gets her private phone. Shall we make it a gift for her sixteenth birthday?"

He gave the nervous little laugh his wife associated with confession. It usually prefaced I-forgot-our-anniversary. "As a matter of fact, dear, I've already made arrangements for the installation." Then, in a calming tone; "We'll lay it on the line to Jennifer. She's not to use it excessively. Even if it is her phone. The new models have built-in timers."

"I was worried about that. There's been evidence of hearing and sight damage."

"Not a thing to worry about, with the timer attachment."

"Well, if you're sure—"

"The phone's to be put in tomorrow morning."

That night Jennifer was admitted to the Visiphone Company's med unit. The admitting nurse shaved her head, then gave her a becoming wig "just until your own hair grows back in, dearie—" and administered the pre-op medication. Early next morning the company's chief brain surgeon opened Jennifer's skull and installed the visiphone, skillfully linking the miniaturized circuits to optic and also the auditory nerves so that Jennifer would receive both sound and picture on her own private phone. ∞

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 (Continued from page 21)

through the crowd and put an arm around him, holding him up as his legs started to give way.

"No—no, it was written. It was written. Grandpopkins has assumed a terrible Karma by this deed. He must not be allowed to escape in death."

Grandpopkins laughed as the bands of pain tightened in his chest and told him it made no difference what they did. He was dying, dying with blood on his knife and he was happy.

"Come on, Old One, back to the tribe," Earth Mother said, trying to lift him in her arms.

"Let me go, you—" Grandpopkins cursed her with every obscenity he could remember from a hundred and ten years of living.

"Oh, un-cool—up tight—unlove," Earth Mother moaned and then her round, placid face faded from his vision.

"He is dying," Sunflower Sam said.

"We must pray to the High Gurus in Hashbury," Chief Speed said. "He dies with much Karma on his soul."

"We must send to the Great White Brotherhood on Mount Shasta," Flopsy said. "They will know what to do. We must not be left with this mark against our tribe."

"The Ascended Masters will surely help us," Earth Mother said. "They will bring him back so he can try again to achieve perfection."

"Shut up, you sonsofbitches, and let me die in peace," Grandpopkins muttered as his eyes glazed.

"No, no! You must join us in reciting a manta. Om, Krisna, Om. You've acquired a Karma that is out of sight. You've got to relive to kick it. You killed the Zapper!"

"Yes, I killed the crudhead. He murdered First Little Pig. Someone had to kill him."

"No, you don't understand. You don't relate. That wasn't murder. That was street theater," Earth Mother said but she was talking to thin air because the darkness he longed for closed over him even as she was speaking.

"We must say many mantas," Earth Mother said. "We must pray that he will not be dead forever."

"Yes, we will send to Hashbury at once," Chief Speed said, "and ask the Great Gurus to return him to us."

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Ballantine Books

IT IS June and science fiction is proliferating away at the Milford Workshop and in other enlightened courses and areas all around the country. Summertime in hardcover publishing, traditionally a lazy, easy time, is a period of frenzied activity for paperbounders. The catalog for Fall was all done by the end of May. Now comes the time when the books which were a gleam in someone's eye a month ago have to be translated into a reality—or the catalog becomes a wicked lie. This year is particularly frenzied because of the high immediacy quotient in many of the environmental books we are doing. It is with a sigh of relief that one can turn to something staid, steady and reliable, like s.f.

•

(INCIDENTALLY, how reassuring that the D.A.R. disapproves of this environmental flap—we must be on the right track. Not that we are fanatic. Anybody who wants to is welcome to believe it's all a Marxian plot to divert attention from American high living. Ourselves, we simply believe its high time folks get their sexual kicks from sex and not from big cars, TV sets, and electric toothbrushes . . .)

RIGHT ON. Okay, its Clark Ashton Smith this month, in a volume titled ZOTHIQUE—he of the prose of decadent iridescence, just to prove that not all Adult Fantasy is fun and fairies . . . It's rich stuff, vivid and powerful, with a great cover by George Barr. And this month it's DAY MILLION, by Frederik Pohl—a varied group of the master's later short stories to celebrate the reissue of three earlier collections, also available this month—THE CASE AGAINST TOMORROW (**aha**!), THE MAN WHO ATE THE WORLD (how prophetic can you get?) and DIGITS AND DASTARDS (the answers are all in the numbers, right?). And this month, a newcomer to the fold—R.W. Mackelworth. His first novel, a strangely haunting tale of the remnants of life surviving in a world of deathly cold, living on dreams of "the warm." Remember that theory about the polar icecaps and a pull on the Earth's floating crust? Or alternatively a shift in the axis? It could lead to a lot of excitement—and does, in TILTANGLE.

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MEANWHILE, back at the plant, the motto for the month is GARBAGE IS GOLD. No pun intended. We'll almost certainly be doing a book about garbage—but that's a goodie to come.

BB

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"Yes," the Love Children said, "Send us back our Grandpopkins so that he may one day achieve Satori."

THREE hours later in the deep vaults beneath the sacred city of Hashbury, a group of Guru-scientists met to consider urgent prayers.

"We have one hundred and twenty prayers requesting that Grandpopkins Jeb MacAllison be returned by means of rebirth to the loving arms of his family for the good of his soul," the High Guru said.

"The request has been approved by the White Brotherhood and by the Ascended Masters, and the Legate of All-Mother India has expressed no displeasure," said another Guru-Scientist. "Provided that shipments from that area are increased next year."

"Very well," the High Guru said. "Is there a pregnant one among the MacAllison Tribe?"

"Yes, the Earth Mother herself."

"Good. Set the Karma Computer to collect the electrical emanations of his soul mind and prepare him for rebirth. Return him to the bosom of his loving family. Return him to the womb of his Earth Mother."

Grandpopkins returned to consciousness screaming. His screams turned to gurgled curses as he felt the warmth of Earth Mother's arms around him and the L-O-V-E of his tribe.

"Oh, isn't he darling?" Earth Mother crooned, poking a finger into his belly. "Isn't he the sweetest, cuddliest thing you ever saw? You darling, darling baby!"

"We'll start him on acid as soon as he goes on formula," Chief Speed said. "We won't let him go through another life not turned on."

"Right," Earth Mother said. "I think we'll name him Bunny Hug.

"Groovy, groovy," Sunflower Sam said, and Flopsy, Mopsy and Peter Rabbit joined in. "Groovy, groovy!"

Grandpopkins screeched his anger—his impotent anger. But then he quieted as he realized he still had his awareness of his past life. That was unusual. Ordinarily the rebirth wiped out memories of the past. But he could remember! He could remember the knife with which he had zapped Super-Zapper. Maybe—just maybe—it was still lying around some place. Well, as soon as he could crawl,

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he'd start looking for it. And when he found it, the Love Children had better look out. It might even find its way into Earth Mother's overly fecund womb.

That was a beautiful thought. Maybe they had created a fifth column right in their own cubicle. Fifth column—now that was a funny term. He couldn't remember where he had heard it. He certainly hoped his memory would improve now that he was a hundred and ten years young.

Then he screeched again as Earth Mother bent over him, almost smothering him with her big breasts as she forced a nipple into his mouth and the sickeningly sweet milk flowed down his throat.

He gagged but he didn't merely regurgitate. He puckered up his mouth and aimed a stream of milk right into her face. Then his baby giggles echoed through the shocked room as a portent of things to come. ∞

THE STATE vs. SUSAN QUOD *(Continued from page 122)*

I was stunned. I didn't know where I was going when he led me back to the slab and the attendant pulled away the sheet.

I could not speak. I stared in horror and disbelief. There was no blood, but this was my golden Susan—her face a little distorted but otherwise—

"What happened?" I whispered.

"She jumped from the eightieth floor," said Smith. "That isn't all."

He drew the sheet lower. I made to stop him because it was no man's privilege now to know how Susan looked below the waist. But he stopped of his own accord. The sheet was below that golden navel. Her abdomen had cracked open. Miniaturized controls dangled on twisted filaments from the wound.

I felt faint. My eyes went blind for a moment. I realized I was being led out of the room.

"Obviously you didn't know," said Smith.

I shook my head. I looked again at the white enamel door and couldn't believe it. Susan—my golden Susan—an android.

"Since there's no legal way to declare an android dead, we'll

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have to bring decommission proceedings—and for that we'll need your testimony. Naturally it will be necessary to establish your background and we would prefer to do that with a surgical examination, so there will be no question." He added apologetically, "You know how excitable the public is."

Yes, I knew. Hadn't they torn the world upside down over Senator Vauxhall's blonde, Felicity? I nodded in a daze. "I'll have to see the President first," I said.

Smith told me to use his car.

I FOUND the President in his private office and told him what had happened.

"I always knew it was a sensitive family," he said, "but I didn't expect to see family pride built into an android."

I said, unable to think of her as a machine, "Maybe it developed."

The President was thoughtful. "She was torn between loyalty to a human she had been built to regard as her grandfather—and love for you. No doubt of the fact that Junius tried to use her to sway you. She didn't know the answer. The first android suicide. Very human." He looked at me. "What now?"

"They will bring a decommission action against Susan and they want me to submit to a surgical examination to complete the hearing."

He studied me for a long time, then smiled that famous smile.

"You know what you have to do," he said.

True. I knew what I had to do. The unexpected loss of the gold had been bad enough but this was far worse. Greed always betrays humans. It had betrayed Junius Quod. Androids are built better. The world would recover.

SO IT was that an hour later I entered my private jet, fueled for a long trip. Right now I am south of Mexico City on the way to Costa Rica. Irazu is still erupting. I know only one means short of a hydrogen bomb for destroying a body absolutely. It has to be done, for a hundred forty-six Congressmen and thirty-two Senators —and the President himself—would otherwise be revealed. If I should be forced into surgery the work of sixty years would be destroyed.

Smoke rolls in the south. ∞

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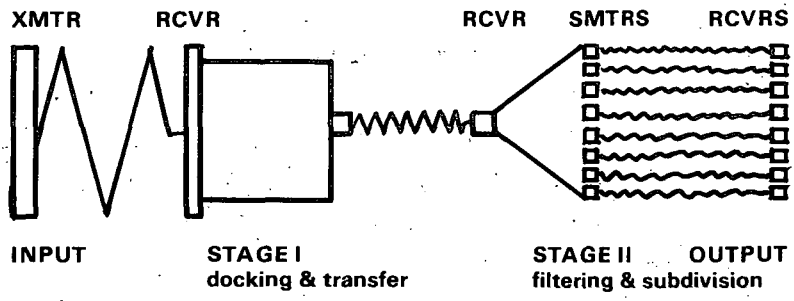
 (Continued from page 85)

6. Pipeline

The mechanical aspect is even more critical, the Thoughtsman explained. *The research required to locate a suitable and amenable subject could be done by straight observation and analysis but the physical construction of such a massive pipeline was an appalling project. Transmission has to be virtually instantaneous because of the perishability of the merchandise and the sheer volume also generates terrific problems. We have constructed a series of gateways, transferpoints to accommodate and differentiate the ingredients of the shipment. The first stage, located on the alien planet for convenience, connects directly to the input transmitter and is exceedingly large, since it must dock the alien tanker itself. Within it is a smaller transmitter to handle the cargo alone. The second stage, based on a world of our own system, is to receive and divide the mass into a number of lesser segments, each of which is retranslated individually. At this point the packaging material is also filtered out so that—*

Not clear, a chorus of thoughts came. *Illustrate it.*

The Thoughtsman projected a diagram:



Now there was an aura of comprehension.

Because of the vagaries of planetary motion and interstellar

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transmission conditions, the Thoughtsman continued, *precise timing is essential. The other world, being of a larger order than our own, possesses a differential of duration with respect to ours that affects transmission. Our emissary has been most intricately programed and is fully competent, but because of those time and size differentials is working under disadvantage.*

A chorus of thoughts interjected. *Are you implying that this could fail? That our tremendous effort and investment may be wasted? That you are gambling with our vital resources?*

No, no! the Thoughtsman protested. But the truth was out: the success of the entire project depended on the performance of a disadvantaged representative and they did not have sufficient resource to make a second attempt.

At any rate, the Thoughtsman finished, *we shall know very shortly. This Assembly chamber overlooks one of the five thousand output apertures distributed throughout our world. We shall witness success or failure before we disperse.*

There was nothing more to discuss. Tensely they concentrated on the aperture and waited for the verdict. Success would preserve their existence by providing the necessary hedge against continuing animate senescence; failure would bring them that much closer to extinction.

7. Climax

She sat upon him, her knees drawn up with her arms around them. "It's almost time, Burg," she said. "We'd better start now. Put your hand around me."

Start?

He curved his fingers around her body as she let go her knees to accommodate his embrace. He was amazed that she remained so delicate. He throbbed deep within her. By rights he should be projecting beyond her head, yet this was not the case.

Minnie took his fingers and pressed them against her breast and thighs. Sensitive now to the nuances of her tiny body, he reacted to the tender flesh as though it were full-size. Large or small, she *was* his dream-girl and he *did* love her. Culmination was incipient.

"Now!" she cried, flexing her entire body against him. "Please, Burg, now!"

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Stimulated by the frenzy of her flesh he let himself go. She clung to his fingers, kissing them and biting them.

Like the rumble of a live volcano it came, throbbing up from the fundament, pressuring chthonic valves, gathering into an irresistible swell. A steaming geyser distended the conduit and burst into individuality. And after it a second thrust pumped up from the depths to lay waste all hesitation. And a third, a fourth, and a fifth, spewed torrentially out in as many seconds. Then, with decreasing force, three more. And finally two others that oozed along as though squeezed from a tube of toothpaste, and apathy set in.

Troy was down.

Minnie slumped as he did, a weary but satisfied smile on her lovely face.

"We did it, Burg," she whispered. "We did it."

As though, he thought, a great deal more had been at stake than an act of physical love between two people.

8. Denouement

Stage I was almost entirely filled by the tremendous turgid purple tanker from the alien world and when the first bolus avalanched from the gaping slit of its orifice the impact was such as virtually to sunder the cylinder. But the baffles held and the second transmitter channeled the viscous mass through in its entirety. The Stage II receiver, light-years distant, filtered and funneled it into the myriad subtransmitters and it emerged at last in fractional spurts into the Sea of Life.

There was a collective sigh of minds as the Council of Oomus perceived the blast of plasma from the adjacent aperture. The shipment had come: ten thousand viable entities in this subsection alone, each living body over a foot in diameter with a flexing tail forty feet long, driving heedlessly forward as it encountered the living water.

Tall Troy's on fire! the Thoughtsman reflected for no sensible reason. What was fire? What was Troy?

And the giant, tired egg-matrices of Oomus were waiting for the amalgamation, for the vigor of new life, new notions, new chromosomes. All over the world, surrounding five thousand apertures, they were ready. Semisentient masses capable of adapting if only

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granted a fresh blueprint in place of the senescent retreads of the past billion years. Now that rejuvenating strain had come—from a source whose monstrosity defied the imagination.

An hour later the second bolus arrived, as brisk and massive as the first. And an hour after that, the third.

The council remained for the full twelve hours the complete shipment took, perceiving every aspect raptly, though the last two surges were but gentle swells with little content. In all, five hundred million swimming sperm cells came, enough for every available egg. It meant salvation for Oomus. Not life as it had been, for these were alien chromosomes; but their uniformity guaranteed that every developing egg would be compatible with those of its generation. A new animation had replaced and improved the old.

And what of the emissary? the chairman inquired of the Thoughtsman as they basked in the ambient grandeur of the alien gift.

Contact has been broken, the Thoughtsman replied. *We could not maintain it longer; our mechanisms were out of power. She will have to remain there.*

Can she exist alone?

Oh yes—she is of otherworld substance but based on our own cellular design. She cannot imbibe nourishment in the alien manner but any future shipments she is able to procure will be conserved in Stage I and routed back to animate her own flesh. That segment of the equipment draws its power from the alien world and will function indefinitely. She can endure, theoretically, for a long time—many thousands of our years—if she is only able to obtain chromosome rejuvenation regularly.

I fear that is impossible, the chairman thought. *What alien would donate a cargo sufficient to reanimate an entire world just to oblige a creature like that? I deeply regret that, in our urgency to save our form of existence, we were forced to create such an ungainly multicelled monster doomed to a brief and miserable existence.*

It is hardly fair, the Thoughtsman agreed morosely. *She does have a good mind and strong feelings, since these were part of the necessary specifications for success. Had I not been preoccupied with our own concerns I would have remembered her situation and in mercy terminated her life as the mission ended. Even a monster does not deserve to suffer unnecessarily.*

But it was a minor sadness, in the face of their new joy. ∞

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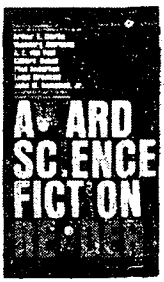

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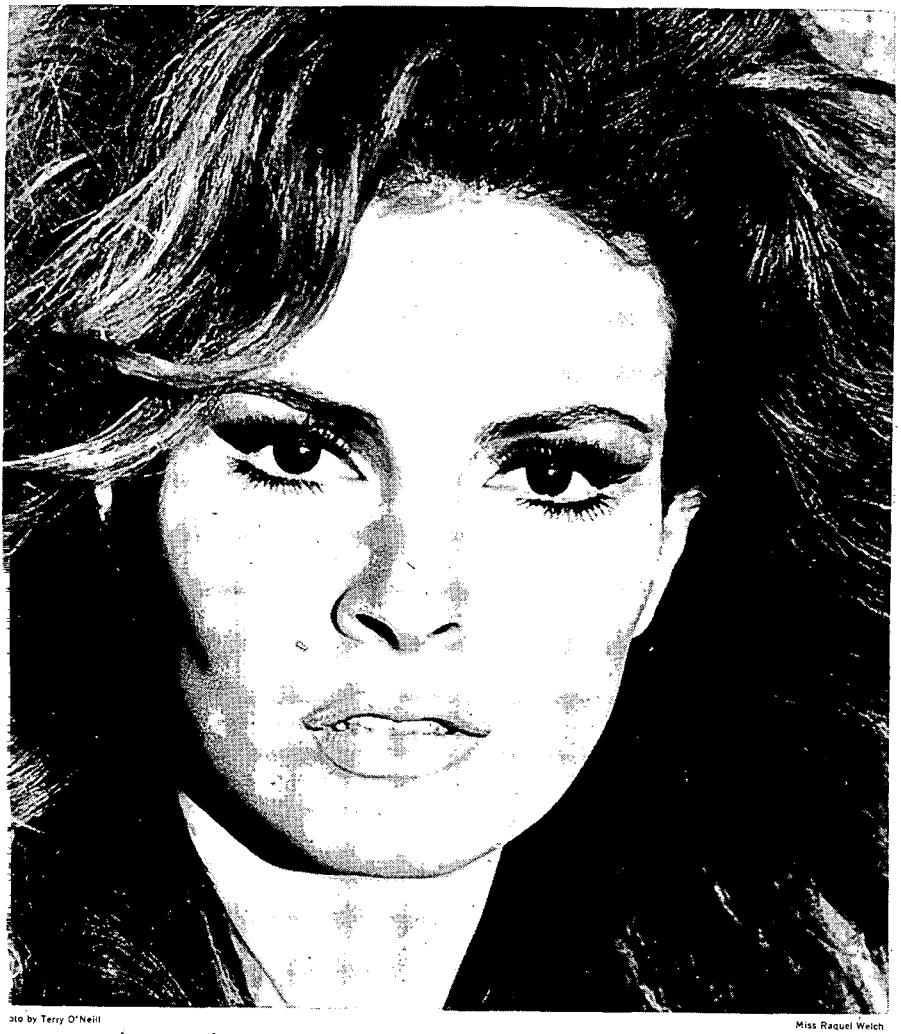

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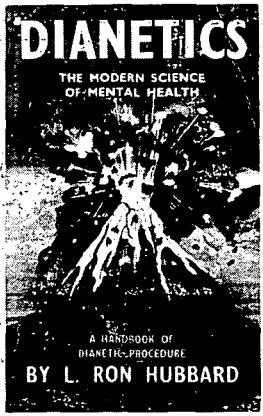

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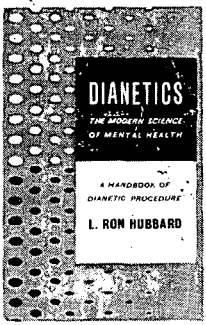

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